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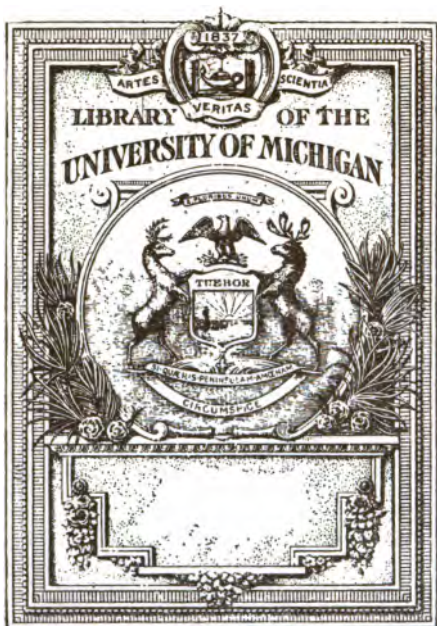
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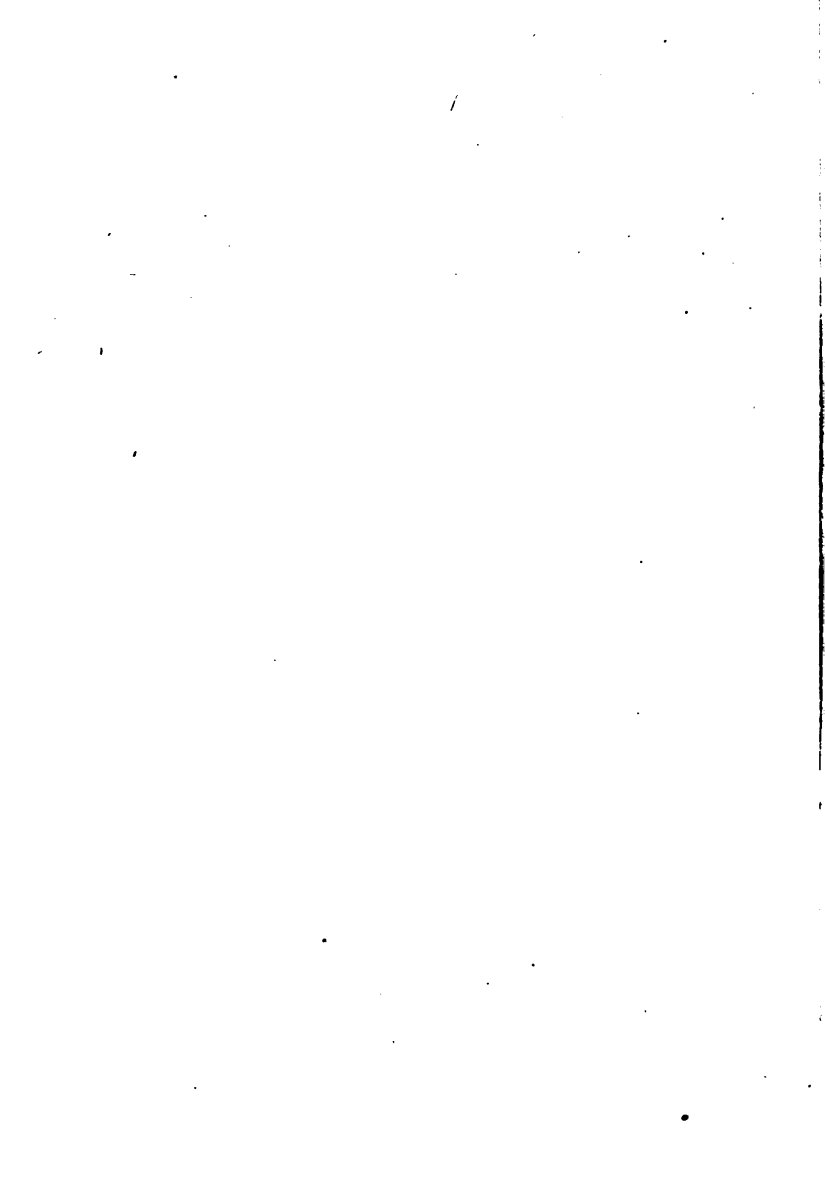
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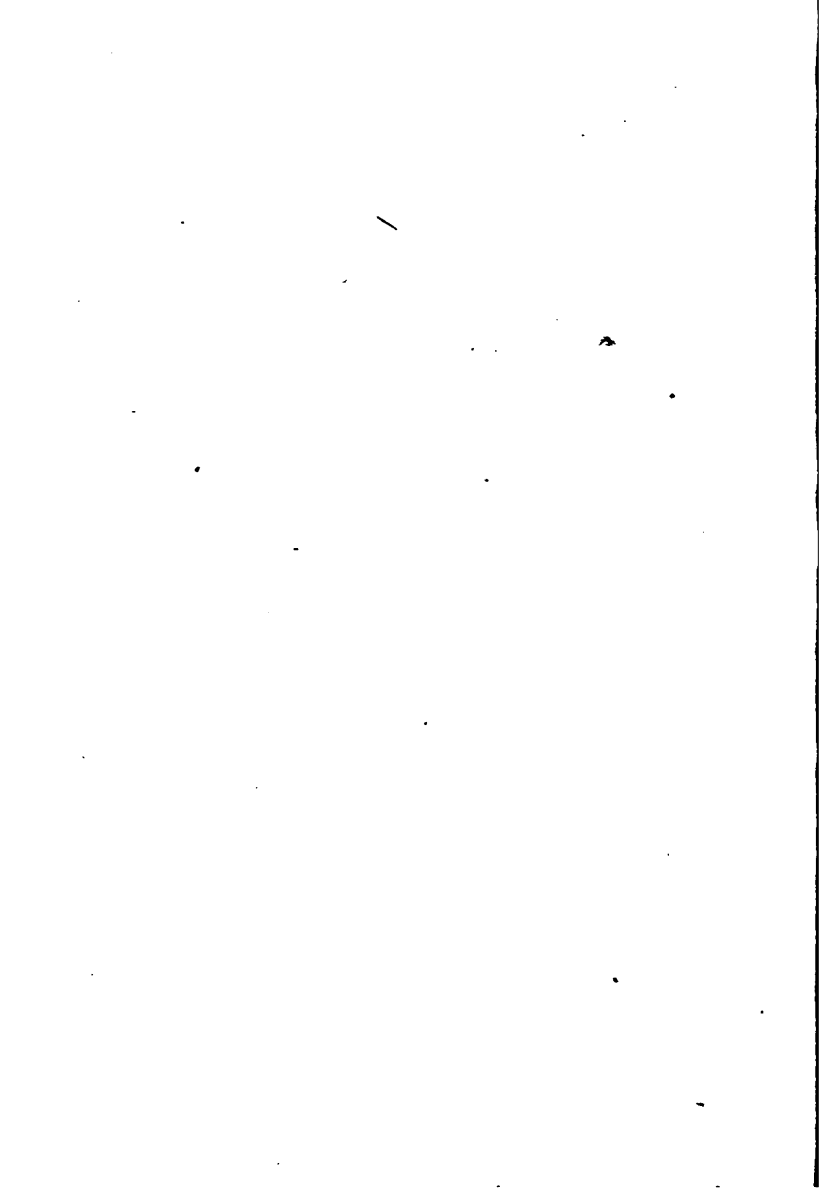




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The Three Sorrows of Storytelling

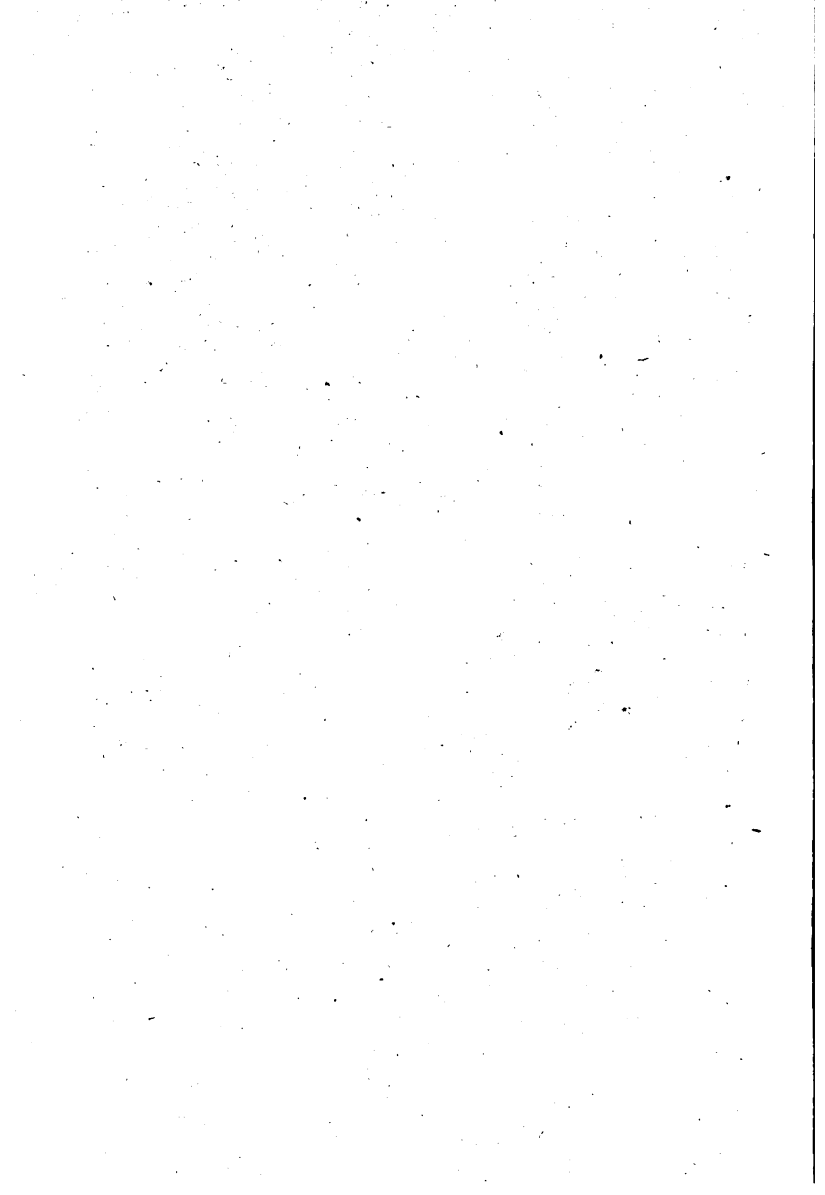
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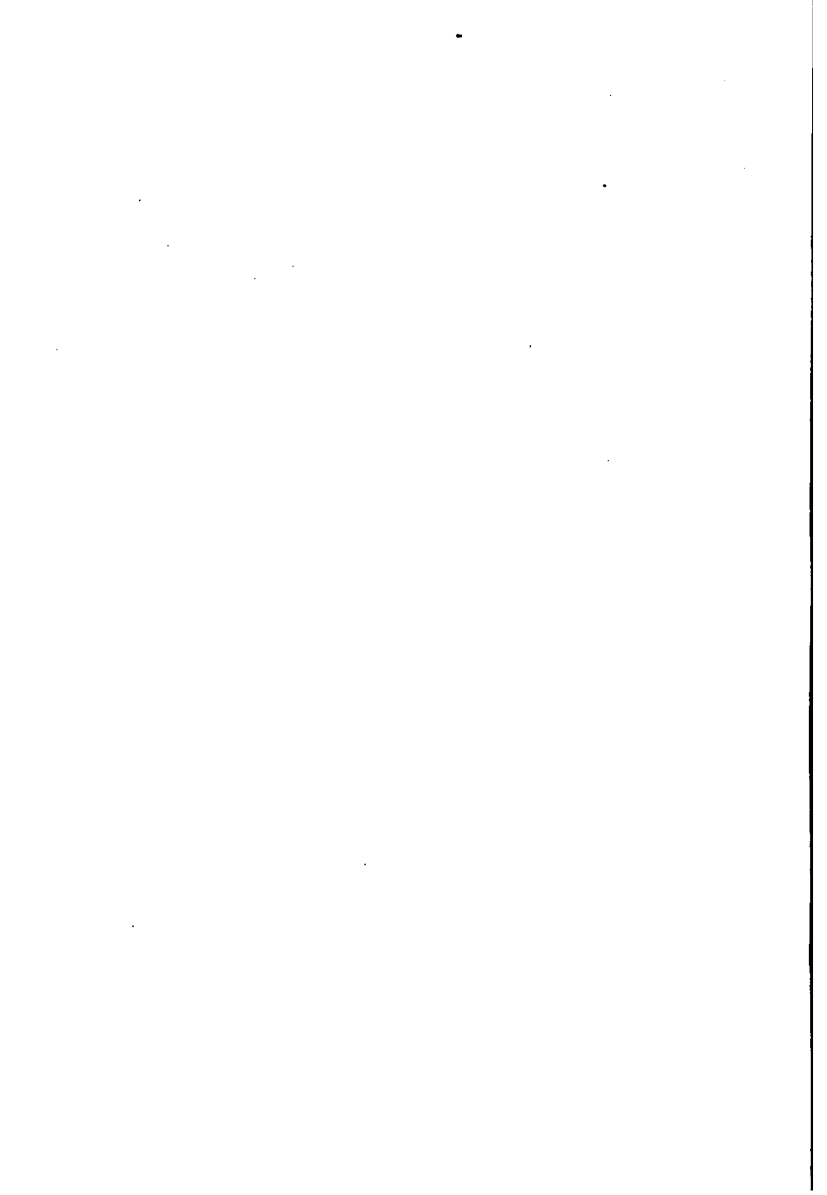
BY

DOUGLAS HYDE, LL.D., M.R.I.A.

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN



Theribald Dickson 1895



THE THREE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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LONDON : T. FISHER UNWIN

The Three Sorrows of Story-telling

AND

BALLADS OF ST. COLUMKILLE

BY

DOUGLAS HYDE, LL.D., M.R.I.A.

(*Aln Chaoibín Aoiðinn*)

Author of "*Leabhar Sgeulungeacra*," "*Beside the Fire*,"
"*Love Songs of Connacht*," "*Story of Early Gaelic
Literature*," &c.

Còmh-farò téirdeann tear a' r fuact,
Còmh-farò fuact agur gnáò;
Téirdeann an t-eud 'ran rmuor
Agur panann ann do gnáò.

—Sean Rann.

I.e., equal-far go heat and cold, equal-far go hate and love, but the
jealousy goeth into the marrow and there abideth for ever.

—*Old Saying.*

London

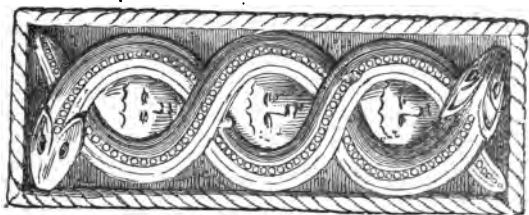
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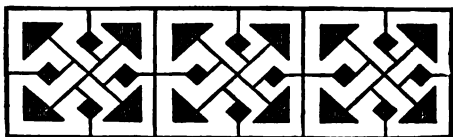
PREFACE.



HE first of the following poems, "Déirdre," was written (successfully) for the Vice-Chancellor's prize in Dublin University in 1887, about which time, being enamoured of the subject, I also tried to turn the other two "Sorrows of Story-telling" into orthodox English Iambics. They would, however, never have seen the light—at least not in this shape—had they not, in Mr. Fisher Unwin's absence, been sent to

ness in mistake for a volume of the New Irish
 Library. Hence their appearance now. I have
 included in them a few ballads on St. Columkille,
 and on the Lament of Adamnan, or translated
 from the Irish. The difference between the epic
 and the fragmentary story is very obvious to
 the student of Irish literature, and these few
 ballads show their conventional English treatment,
 which is very different in this respect at least,
 from the Irish.





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press in mistake for a volume of the New Irish Library. Hence their appearance now. I have subjoined to them a few ballads on St. Columkille, founded on the Latin of Adamnan, or translated from the Irish. The difference between the epic wholeness of Pagan romance and the fragmentary nature of early Christian story is very obvious to every student of Irish literature, and these few pieces, despite their conventional English treatment, may, I think, be regarded as, in this respect at least, fairly typical.





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THE THREE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING.



TO ÉIRĠRE.



N days of old, in times long since gone by,
Oh, strike my harp a mournful, mournful
strain,

In days of old, in times long since gone by,
(That golden period shall return no more)

Ere Mève had humbled Ulster's chivalry,
Ere proud Emania's towers kissed the dust,
Ere yet the Red Branch Knights had tasted shame,
Ere smoking rafters, blackened walls, and blood,
Had stained the stately cradle of our race,
In all Ultonia there was never one

Who dared provoke or bide the heavy hand
 Of Conor, son of Nessa: he it was
 Who, full of wisdom, skilled in ruling men,
 A man of many wiles, a prudent man,
 Held all the noble North in his control,
 And none dared cross him, till the fatal day
 When she, the morning star of loveliness,
 Unhappy Helen of a western land
 First flung the apple of discordance down.

It chanced upon a day—a dismal day,
 Oh, strike my harp a mournful, mournful strain,
 That Conor came, as often was his wont,
 To Félim's halls and feasted like a king;
 His friends around him, and his Druid old
 Who knew what was, what is, what is to be,
 And thus the Druid made his prophecy:

“To thee, O Félim, shall be born to-night
 A sting to sting to madness this our king,
 A sword to sever sharp from Ulster's tree
 The Branch that is her pride, the proud Red Branch,
 A ram to batter down Emania's pride,
 A flame to scorch the land from shore to shore.”

Then Conor answered thus the ancient man:
 “There hangs o'er thy pronouncement such a mist
 The eye can pierce it not, to see the shape
 Thy words conceal behind it, speak again,

What saidest thou? We understand thee not."

And then the aged Druid answered them:

"I see two shining stars—they are her eyes,

I see a web of silk—it is her hair,

I see a trunk of ivory—her neck,

A double shower of white pearls—her teeth,

A bunch of crimson fruit—it is her mouth:

I hear a harp vibrating sweet and low—

It is her voice more soft than fairy notes,

Oh, pink-white fawn in all thy loveliness!"

Then Conor spake unto the ancient man:

"Old man, thou seest her, then happy thou!

So well thou paintest her whoe'er she be,

I would in sooth that I had seen her too."

Then spake the Druid with great eyes a-flame:

"A sea! a sea of blood! a crimson sea!

It foams, it rises, higher, higher still,

It fills the valleys, and a triple stream

From Alba's mountains high comes thundering down,

A crimson river to the crimson sea."

Then all around the hospitable board

Rose up in consternation, for his word

Was ever known to be a word of truth,

And much they revered the ancient man.

With many voices then they cried aloud

To slay the birth, whatever it should be:

For horror seized them at the sea of blood

The hoary Druid spake of, and they thought
 Never to let that crimson sea arise.
 For foolish were they all, and ignorant,
 Nor yet remembered how that man may strive
 His little best to beat against his doom,
 And forge him barriers, and bolts, and bars,
 To seize upon his Fate and hold it back,
 But it was never held of human hands.
 So counselled they, and Félim gave consent
 To slay the birth whatever it should be.
 But Conor, crafty manager of men,
 Persuaded from their counsel all the rest,
 With words and subtly chosen arguments,
 Wherewith he wont to evermore prevail:

"Not so, ye men of Ulster, not with blood,
 Shall we profane this hospitable home,
 Or bring a shame of shames upon ourselves.
 Hear now, for this is better counsel far,
 The maiden from whose eyes or from whose mouth
 So great a stream of blood it seems must flow,
 To me myself I take her, and to me
 And not to Ulster be the gain or loss,
 Which may arise from things so wonderful.
 But I shall nurse her in a silent place,
 A lonely rath within a lonely land,
 Where none shall ever gain a sight of her,
 Nor ever wish to see her, drawing near,

Nor ever think to hear her, passing nigh,
But in seclusion (so that all be safe)
I rear her up unto myself apart,
This wondrous thing, if such indeed she be,
And upon me shall be the loss alone:
We cannot stain our feast with infant blood."

Then all applauded, for they magnified
His counsel like the counsel of a god,
For all his plans had evermore been wise.
Unhappy they! they little dreamt, indeed,
That Death himself was standing close behind
And listened trembling for his future prey.
With joy he heard the people's loud acclaim,
Then spread abroad his coal-black wings again,
And sniffing blood went whistling through the air.

But unto Félim on that night was born
A female child, and Déirdre was the name
That all men called it. Soon, his feasting o'er,
When to Emania came the king again,
He brought with him the infant and its nurse
(For Félim rendered them right willingly),
And in a lonely rath he placed the pair
To grow according to the will of Fate.
He added too a tutor, and he sent
His faithful female messenger—men called
Her Lavarcam—to run and often see

How fared they all, and bring him word again.

So wore the time away for Déirdre there,
And from an infant soon she grew a child,
And from a child she grew into a girl,
And from a girl into a maiden fair
Of strange and all-surpassing loveliness,
With great sad eyes, like pieces of the sky,
And silken tresses in a golden web,
And creamy skin, and rowan-berry mouth,
And neck of ivory, and breast of snow,
And fairy form, and foot as fleet as deer,
And voice as sweet and musical and low
As strains aerial dropping from the clouds.
And Lavarcam, his female messenger,
Thus evermore reported to the king:
"O Conor, king! there is not, never was
In female form such perfect loveliness."
So she reported and the king rejoiced.

But none came nigh unto the lonely rath,
For all men knew that Conor kept her there,
Reserving her to gratify himself.
For Conor's hand was heavy, and his arm
Was long, and fearing to provoke his wrath
All held aloof, and no man questioned him.

So wore the time away; the smiling spring
Crept into golden summer, standing soon

Aside to let the purple autumn in ;
So autumn took its place, with caw of crows
And ruddy sunsets, sad and softly calm,
And tingèd leaves, and shocks of yellow corn,
And stillness and intensity of peace.
But when it came that autumn too should die—
Her lease of life dependent on a day—
Then winter lent to her a shroud of snow
To cover up therewith her face, and die.
Thus shrouded in a mantle pure and white
The gentle autumn passed in peace away.

But so it chanced, that on the new-fallen snow,
Just crisp and brittle with the first bright frost—
The hale old year rejoicing—so it chanced
That on the snow before the lonely rath
The tutor took and for provisions slew
A calf, and shed its crimson blood abroad,
A sheet of red that mottled all the white.
Then Déirdre came and stood upon the wall
And clapped her hands with jubilance to see
The lovely snow so soft, and smooth, and white,
And drink the crisp invigorating frost.
Thus as she stood and laughed aloud for joy
A raven gliding on an even wing,
A great black raven, on the snow alit,
And drank the warm bright blood that had been spilt.
Then Déirdre clapped her hands and cried aloud :

"Oh, Lavarcam, how beautiful he were
(If there, indeed, was ever such a youth)
Who in himself combined those colours three,
That snowy white in his transparent skin,
That ruddy crimson on his glossy cheek,
And tresses sable as the raven's plumes,
Oh, what a man! how beautiful he were!"

Then all unwisely answered Lavarcam:
"Yes, such a man, my lovely child, there is,
And only one; go search from sea to sea
And such another you shall never find
As Naesi, son of Usnach; there indeed
You see the ruddy cheek, the raven hair,
The soft transparence of the snowy skin,
Yes, such a one there is, and only one!"

But Déirdre pondering upon her words
Had given all her soul to see the man
Her nurse had said to be so beautiful.
And so she urged the woman day by day,
Nor gave her any peace, but pressed her sore,
And evermore beseeching her she prayed
To let her once behold, but once, the youth
Whom she alleged to be so beautiful.
And so her longing over-mastered her,
As half enraged at her imprisonment,
And half indignant at the loneliness,
Which now began to waken in herself

(But never until now had fretted her),
And partly, too, a curiosity
Perhaps more natural to woman's breast
Than man's, and yet most natural to all.
A craving, too, for new experience
With, mayhap, some suspicion of the king,
Combined to give her eloquence to urge
Her nurse with soft persuasion, often mixed
With sad complaint and many streams of tears,
And kisses, and endearments, amid which
She mingled hot reproaches, praying thus:
"How can you be so cruel, O my nurse,
So stony-hearted unto me, your child!
Hereafter how shall I consort with man
Who am a stranger to my very race
And all unfitted to take part in life
At all; or do you wish to see me die
Refusing me what meanest hinds enjoy,
The sound of friendly voices, converse sweet
With other lives and manners than our own?
Or are you leagued in a conspiracy
With Conor and those other wicked men
To keep me ever in this dreary tower
And make me weep and weep my life away?"

Then, as a petted, snowy-breasted dove
That seeks for food at some fair lady's hand,
If it receive it not, will softly peck

The hand it waits on with its golden bill,
 Or nestle close with many blandishments,
 And will not leave her until satisfied,
 So she at length with flattery and tears,
 And fond appeals, and wistful loveliness,
 And sighs, prevailed upon her nurse—for much
 Was Lavarcam in dread of Conor's wrath—
 Until at length she promised everything.

Nor many days thereafter, as it chanced,
 The aged woman gained intelligence
 That Naesi hunting came with horns and hounds
 To chase the dun deer in that lonely land.
 Then day by day she let her pupil range
 Throughout the upland glades and woody lawns,
 And gave her all her way, if haply she
 Might see the hunter and be satisfied.
 From glen to glen she roved, from plain to plain,
 Rejoicing in her freedom, and she called
 To life the trembling echoes of the hills,
 The daughters of the rock that never die.

But Naesi, for his fate was on the wing,
 Drew also nigh unto the lonely rath,
 If haply he might chance to see without
 The maiden born beneath the prophecy,
 Whom men had said to be so wonderful,
 Whom churlish Conor had secreted there.

For haply, too, her thoughts which numberless
Towards him all took their way, her wingèd hopes
On him concentrated, formed a viewless thread
Which gently woven round about his will
Invisibly compelled it unto hers.

For I indeed have heard the ancient men,
The half-prophetic and inspired bards,
Affirm that such a thing is possible.
But Naesi thought to see a prodigy
Unlike to other mortals, so he came.

Then from a tangled thicket in his path
Déirdre, forth-coming like a moving star,
Went towards him, passing as a brilliant bird
Which none could look upon without desire
Invincible, to follow and to take.

Nor dreamt he ever that it was the bird
Whose cage he saw before him—that lone rath—
He rather thought, for that she looked so bright
And wore a saffron vest and broach of gold,
While golden tresses down her shoulders streamed,
That she was of the great De Danann race
Of more than mortal power, who can move
Invisible at will, or change their form.

Stricken with wonder, he accosted her :

“ Oh, daughter of the bright De Danann race,
Say do I see before me Cliona
Or Ainè, or the gentle fairy queen

Whose home is deep within the dark green hill?
 I am a stranger in this lonely land,
 And pray thee tell me, ah, refuse me not,
 Who dwells in yonder rath, and shall I get
 A welcome there if I should enter it?"

Then Déirdre answered, speaking soft and low,
 Whilst all the light within her dewy eyes
 Went out towards Naesi, and her silver voice
 Played like the singing of a crystal brook:
 "Yes, enter warrior, and all we have
 Is thine; it is not much, but it is thine.
 I think I know thee, thou art Usnach's son
 Whom men call Naesi; is it even so?"

Then Naesi owned himself and questioned her:
 "And who art thou, since form so beautiful
 And such surpassing loveliness of face
 And grace, and mein, and dignity at once,
 My dazzled eye has never looked upon."

Whereat rejoiced she answered him again:
 "My name is Déirdre, I am not a queen,
 Nor am I of the great De Danann race,
 But I am most unfortunate of all
 Who live and move and draw the breath of life;
 I am a prisoner, I am a slave."

Then answered Naesi, stricken deep with love:
 "Oh Déirdre, art thou Déirdre? I had thought
 That thou wert of the great De Danann blood,

That thou wert more than human ; is it so
That haughty Conor makes a slave of thee ? ”

Then answered Déirdre, and her heart beat high :
“ Had I to champion me a sword like thine,
A brother such as thou, a friend like thee,
I should not tremble at King Conor’s frown.
Wilt thou protect me, Naesi ? See, I throw
Myself on thy protection ; on thy cheek
I strike this golden ball to raise a mark
If thou refuse, of everlasting shame
And burning black disgrace to never die.
I put thee under *geasa*, I conjure,
I charge, I bind thee, that thou succour me.”

Then Naesi felt the blow upon his cheek,
And feared the spot of shame that there would grow
If he should break the *geasa* with which she
Had bound him, though unwilling ; yet he thought
Upon the anger of the awful king
If he should rob him of his long kept prey ;
And so he stood a while irresolute.
But when he looked again on Déirdre, when
He saw her loveliness, her warm young cheek
O’ermantled with the hot bright blush of shame,
Her dewy eyelids tremulous with tears,
Timid uncertainty upon her lips,
Mixed with a wistful, wild anxiety,
Then he forgot himself, forgot the world,

Forgot the king, whose heavy-handed wrath
 No man had ever known to cease, until
 It had exacted vengeance twenty-fold.
 For Conor's arm was long, his sword was keen,
 His memory undying, his revenge
 Was never yet forgotten nor deferred—
 All men believed it unavoidable—
 But Naesi now forgot it, and forgot
 Himself, and death and life, and answered her :
 " Oh, Déirdre, see, thou art indeed a queen,
 And I thy vassal, and my heart is thine,
 I lay it at thy feet, and do with it
 According as thou wilt, I give it thee.
 Thy spot of shame shall never rise on me.
 If thou wilt follow me to Alba's shore,
 King Conor's arm, however far it reach,
 Shall never stretch across the stormy Moyle.
 If thou would'st snatch thyself from Conor's power
 Then linger not. If thou wilt shun thy fate
 Fly with me now, ere word to him go forth
 That we have been together ; enter not
 Again thy rath, but turn and come with me."

So urged he winged words persuading her,
 And showing her the danger of return,
 Telling of Alba's mountains green with pine,
 Wherein they twain would make their peaceful home.
 Whereat half-moved by fear of Conor's wrath,

Giving herself to this, her sudden love,
Which overswept her (as a rising wave
Will wash across a drift of sea-weed left
By some high tide upon a barren rock
And sweep it out to sea again) she gave
Her snow-white hand into his hand, and they
Returned together by the path he came,
With pulses throbbing and with hearts too full
To look at, think on, speak of anything.

And so they travelled till the sun went down,
Nor halted even then, but by the stars
Pursuing still their solitary course
They journeyed on amid the gathering shades,
O'er many uninhabitable plains,
Through valleys, over mountains, and by tarns
Enclosed with gnarled trunks of giant trees
All withering and seared—dark lonely meres
Whose gloomy waters never stirred to life,
Where most do congregate the things of night,
The sullen things that bear no love to man.
But them they hurt not, and at length the dawn
In all its variegated vesture clad
Began to streak the east with lines of fire,
Breaking the clouds into a hundred shapes.
And ere the gold rim of the glorious sun,
Rose broad and bright before them, lo! they stand

By Naesi's and his brothers' well built home.
 And both his brothers come to welcome him,
 Ardan and Ainlé; both, like Naesi, were
 In might and shape—but he was fairest far—
 And much they marvelled, soon as they had seen
 The girl companion he had brought with him.

But when at length his story had been told,
 And when they knew that it was Déirdre, she
 Whom Conor had reserved unto himself,
 Who now had come with Naesi; then indeed
 Fear broke as nearly in upon their heart
 As ever it had done or was to do.
 "Away," they cried at once, "fly, seek ye out
 A safe retreat in Alba's woody glens
 If ye would still remain to see the world,
 Ere Conor's hand fall heavy on ye both."
 And Déirdre prayed to go, and Naesi urged.

Then forth they issued from their well-built house
 And called their followers and friends, and soon
 They launched a long and dangerous black bark
 From out the calm of some blue-winding creek,
 With tiers of smooth co-operating oars
 To fight against the wind; but now its breath
 Blew fair for Alba, so they spanned aloft
 The jubilant and snowy-breasted sail
 And ran the dark impetuous waters down.
 The haughty billows broke before her prow,

And formed behind her, and the crested waves
Beat round her sides, and melted into foam.
The bounding bark exulted, and the wind
Straight drove it on its course to Alba's shore.

There Naesi landed, but his brothers twain
Refused to leave him, though his vassals glad
Bore off again to Erin, So they three
With Déirdre dwelt among the mountains high.

There day by day, when as the golden morn
Glowed in the east and summoned them from sleep,
They started forth with horns and hounds, and chased
The dun-brown deer, and many-antlered stag,
The startled game that flies from hill to hill.
Day after day they searched the woody glades,
And strode along the lofty mountain sides,
Beating the hollow valleys, and at night
Exulting at their work—as hunters do—
They brought their spoil to lay at Déirdre's feet.
Theirs was a little mountain hut which they
Had built her in the spot herself had wished,
Close by the murmur of a waterfall
Which shot itself along a precipice,
And having turbulently made its leap
Through flying mists of spray, and snow-white foam,
Grew calm again, forgetting all its haste,
And gently rippled down the dark green glen.

Their meat was venison, their drink the stream,
 Their sport the headlong chase, and their delight
 To sit by Déirdre and to hear her speak.
 For Naesi's brothers loved her, as a man
 Will love his sister dear; and never day
 Seemed long to them in her companionship;
 Her beauty was so bright, her tones so sweet,
 Her love so great, her presence such a charm
 That all who felt it found it magical.

And so the days were lengthened into weeks,
 The weeks to months, the moving months to years,
 Yet all the four were satisfied, nor wished
 For any change; since not a single cloud
 Nor shadow of unhappiness, nor strife,
 Had risen up to mar their unity
 Since first they landed upon Alba's shore.
 But when the swiftly running year had come
 And gone five times, and ever found them there
 In undiminished happiness and peace,
 Then jealous Fate began to envy them,
 And thus it made its treacherous approach.

It chanced upon a lovely summer eve
 All sat together, when the chase was o'er,
 And watched, while Déirdre with her Naesi played
 Upon a silver board with golden men.
 There as they sat and played, they heard a call

Far off and faint go sounding through the air.

And each on other looked, but Naesi said:

"It was a man of Erin cried that cry,"

Then Déirdre looked on Naesi, and she said:

"Play on, it is a man of Alba's call,

No man of Erin uttered such a cry."

Yet well she knew who uttered it, but she

Feared to reveal it, for she knew and felt

Within herself the first approach of woe,

The deathly rustling of the wing of Fate.

But when again and once again the call

Came faintly falling on the evening air,

Then Naesi also recognised the voice,

And much he joyed at hearing it, and cried:

"The shout is Fergus' shout, mine ancient friend's,

He comes from Erin, 'tis to visit us;

Go forth and seek for him, and bid him come."

"Not so indeed," said Déirdre, "go not forth,

He comes from Conor, and full well I feel

That danger fate and death are at his back.

Last night I saw a dream I told you not,

And it congealed my blood with bitter fear,

And left me sick at heart, I knew not why:

Three birds, three drops of honey in their beaks,

From far Emania flew to us, and left

The honey with us, but they took instead

Three drops of our own blood, and so returned.

And now I know the meaning of the dream.
 The message breathing peace of that false man
 King Conor, is the honey, for more sweet
 Was never honey than King Conor's words,
 And with his honey words he buys our blood.
 Oh, be persuaded by me, go not forth."

But Naesi answered slightly and said:
 "My queen, it is a dream that thou hast dreamed,
 We must not let the noble Fergus wait;
 Let some one now go forth and bring him here."

Then Ardan rose and following the sound,
 Found Fergus landed on the cold grey shore,
 And greeting him with joyous greeting loud,
 He guided him unto their mountain home:
 And all rejoiced to see him, and to hear
 His noble words once more, for he was loved
 By all Ultonia for his nobleness.
 Then Fergus gave them news from Erin, how
 King Conor had invited them again,
 And pledged his kingly word and solemn oath
 That none should even hurt an hair of them.
 But Déirdre started, hearing Fergus' speech,
 Groaning aloud in anguish of her soul,
 And sore besought the rest to stop their ears
 Nor hearken to his all too specious words.
 She urged their present happiness, and urged
 The honour which the clans of Alba paid

To all the sons of Usnach, honour more
Than was allowed them on their native soil.
But Fergus turned their wishes back again
From Déirdre's wish, by picturing the green
High hills of Erin, calling to their mind
The many friends they left behind them there,
And all the Red Branch heroes, one by one.
Then, too, he plighted them his faithful word
That under his protection and his sons',
Illan the Fair, and Buine Ruthless Red,
Though all the men of Erin should oppose,
Yet should the sons of Usnach take no hurt.
And Déirdre's words availed her not at all,
Nor her entreaties, nor her bitter tears:
For longing irresistible to see
Their native land brake over all of them
At very sight of Fergus, and at sound
Of those dear accents of their long-left home,
Which made them deaf to everything beside.
And so in giving and receiving news
In joyous speech (with none but Déirdre sad),
And converse gay, they bore away the night.

But when the morning brightened in the east
They sought the shore and Fergus' hollow bark,
And from her haven launched her on the wave,
And spanned aloft the loud exultant sail,
And sent her on her course before the wind,

And ran the dark impetuous waters down. .

But Déirdre looked behind her, and the tears
Would ever start into her starry eyes,
Nor could she there restrain them, for her heart
Was sad and full to breaking ; and she sang
While pearl-bright drops made salter still the waves :
“ Oh, eastern land I leave, I loved you well,
Home of my heart, I loved and love you well,
I ne’er had left you had not Naesi left.

I loved the Isle of Drayno and Dunfin,
I loved the wood of Cone, the vale of Laidh,
I had not left them had not Naesi left.

Oh, soft Glanmassan, where we rocked to sleep
Above thy glassy harbour, how I loved
To see the great sun burning on thy wave.

Above the lofty cliffs of Glendaroe,
Sweet was the cuckoo’s note on bending bough,
I ne’er had left it had not Naesi left.

Oh, Drayno of the deep resounding shore,
Whose waters roll upon the soft white sand,
My love has left thee, I must leave thee too.”

So Déirdre stood and sang and dropped her tears.
But they for eagerness to see the land
Scarce listened to her softly-sung lament.
When—all too soon—the bark had made her port,
She ceased to sing, and they on Erin’s shore

Landed and shook in pride their freeborn limbs,
And towards Emania's palace bent their way,
Confident in themselves, and confident
In Fergus' power, and in Conor's word.

But when their journey had been shortened well
And they already strained their longing eyes
To greet the lime-white palace seen afar,
Ere night should swallow the declining sun ;
Then from the stately mansion in their path
Barach came down and greeted them, a man
Most treacherously hearted, whom the king
Great Conor, had persuaded to his will :
For there were few indeed but Conor knew
To touch in them some secret spring, to set
Some wish at work to mould them to his way,
He coming down and greeting them, invites
Fergus in special, to a certain feast
Which (plotting with King Conor) he had made ;
For Fergus never could refuse a feast,
Since he was under geasa, and bound down
By mystical injunctions, to partake
Of every feast he was invited to.
Therefore had Conor chosen him, and not
Cuchulain or some other Red Branch knight,
Because he knew he was detachable.
And Conor had persuaded him, and all,
That not to hurt Clan Usnach did he send,

But rather to behold them once again
 Assume their ancient place around his throne,
 Since Ulster now had mourned them all too long.
 But Fergus reddened when he heard the word,
 And shook with livid anger, like as when
 A tawny lion finds itself entrapped
 Within a covered pit, and foams for wrath,
 Lashing his tail, and passing to and fro,
 Until his face be flecked with spots of foam:
 So Fergus chafed, yet could he not refuse.
 Then Déirdre took his hand in hers, and said:
 "Ask, and thine own great heart shall answer thee,
 Which course for thee is worthiest, which more fair,
 More righteous in the sight of gods and men,
 To leave thy feast uneaten, or to leave
 Clan Usnach undefended, for a prey
 To Conor's treachery. Ah! woe is me!"

Then Fergus groaned in misery of soul
 And struggled sore within himself, but yet
 His mystic obligations bound him down.
 And so he said, he left them not alone,
 Nor undefended, while his sons were there.
 And he commended them to both his sons,
 Buine the Ruthless Red, and Illan Finn,
 To guard them carefully, lest any man
 Should even turn an hair upon their heads.
 So he remained behind in rage and shame

And vexed his noble heart, and cursed the day.

But Usnach's sons in anger left him there,
And journeyed towards Emania, and there fell
A shuddering on Déirdre, and she said:
"Oh, Naesi, go not forward, for I see
A cloud upon the sky, a cloud of blood;
It streaks the heavens with a tinge of red,
It casts an ice-cold shadow over me,
It is a chilling cloud and drips with blood:
Oh, Naesi, go not forward, for I fear
To brave yon stormy streak of crimson sky."

Yet neither could she win on Naesi's self
Nor on his brothers, once, to stay their step
Which now had nearly brought them to their goal,
So much they trusted in their own great might.
Then Fergus' sons upbraided her, and said
That they were all-sufficient for her guard,
That she was under their protecting arm:
No man could hurt her even though he would.
And yet once more did Déirdre make essay,
For in herself remained her unknown dread,
A cold foreboding, tightening on her heart.

"Hear me," she said, "if Conor ask ye in
To that great mansion where he feasts himself,
And all men round his board will know you well,
And greet you gladly, then I shall not fear:
If he does this he weaves no treachery.

But if he send us to the Red Branch House
By way of doing honour to his guests,
Then he will surely compass all our deaths,
And cut us off for ever, woe is me!
Indeed, ye know not Conor, nor no man
Has ever known him, but my aged nurse
Was both his confidant and messenger,
And well she understood him, much she feared
And much she hated him; I know him too.
Ah, turn we now, it may not be too late."

But when at evening, weary with the road,
Foot-sore, they came to Conor's palace, where
He feasted with his chief nobility,
The king refused to entertain them there,
And sent them forward to the Red Branch House,
Making excuse that poor were the repast
Which should await them did they eat with him.
Then once again did Déirdre bid them fly,
But shame and pride forbade them, so they went
Forth from the palace to the Red Branch House,
And all the pleasant viands, meat and drink,
That ever yet made glad the heart of man,
Were laid before them on the shining board.
But these they hardly tasted, for they felt
The wily meshes of King Conor's net
That now was closing in upon them all.

Then Conor, for his blood was now on fire,
Sent Lavarcam, his messenger, to see
If Déirdre were as yet so beautiful
As when she fled from her imprisonment.
But Lavarcam loved Déirdre, and she loved
The sons of Usnach, so she came again
And thus reported, that her pupil now
Was changed and greatly faded, and divorced
From all her former beauty. But the king,
Suspicious ever, looking in her face
And not believing, sent another man
Who, spying through an open window, saw
How Déirdre played with Naesi at a board
Of sun-bright silver, full of golden men :
And stricken with her loveliness he came
And told to Conor all that he had seen.

Then Conor fired with rage and jealousy,
At once commanded all his plumèd troops
To give assault upon the Red Branch House,
And slay the sons of Usnach ; and they came
With hosts innumerable as the stars,
To wreak the vengeance of the mighty king.
But Buine sallied forth upon their shout,
And drove them back in terror, and he made
A clearing round about the mansion, red
With gore of slaughtered men, and bodies piled,
For Conor's mercenary soldiers fled.

Then Conor came himself and cried to him
Standing afar, and called him by his name,
And made him many offers; offered gold,
And lands and honours, all that most he knew
Would tempt his soul, if he would but desert
The sons of Usnach in their urgent hour:
For Conor read the mind of every man
And knew the place unguarded of his heart
To find an entrance in his subtlety.
And so he wrought upon him with his words
Till he consented, bought with many lands,
And hope of Conor's friendship. But the youth
Illan the Fair, his brother, issued forth
And chased the troops from round about the Dún,
And slaughtered many of them, and he made
A bloody circuit round the mansion wide,
Till shrieks of dying men appalled the night,
And clash of armour smote upon the sky,
And Conor trembled in his far off tent.
For Illan loathed his brother's treachery,
And now, perchance, he had averted death
From those his charge, until—his feasting o'er—
Great Fergus came again: but hapless fate
First overtook himself, and gave them up
All undefended unto Conor's sword.

For Conor, when his troops were put to flight,
Sent his own son to fight with him, and hung

His own protecting shield about his neck.
It was a magic shield and roared aloud
When danger threatened him who carried it.
And when it sounded high, the three great waves
Of Erin roared responsive to its call,
And smote in violence the angry shore,
And rolled in dreadful thunder to the land ;
Hence ' Ocean ' was the name he called it by.
And now when Illan dealt his deathful blows
Against King Conor's son, it sounded loud,
And Erin's three great billows answered it,
And sent their hollow sea-shout to the heavens.

But Conall Carnach, Fergus' faithful friend,
The stately pillar of the proud Red Branch,
After Cuchulain and himself the most
Renowned of all Ultonia's sons of war,
Heard how it sounded, and he took the field,
Straightway believing it was Conor's self
Who was in danger ; and he came behind
And pierced the warrior with his cruel blade
Full in the back, unwitting who he was,
Or what he fought for ; since he nothing knew
About the sons of Usnach, nor about
The treachery of Conor, nor his breach
Of guarantee, security, and oath.
But when he knew that it was not the king
Who was in danger, when he found that he

Had slain the son of him who was his friend,
Then madness overcame him, and he smote
The son of Conor also to the ground:
There then he left them lifeless, side by side,
And thence departed, chafing in his soul.

But now the net of Fate was drawing close
Around the sons of Usnach, when their last
And best supporter's life blood ebbed away.
For Conor sent once more his captains on
With torches and with coals of glowing fire,
To set ablaze the haughty Red Branch House,
And give the sons of Usnach to the sword.
But Ardan then and Airlé, issuing forth
Rose in their might and turned them all to flight.
And each made once the circuit of the house,
And left his track behind him where he passed,
A bloody track filled full of slaughtered men,
And cloven shields, and broken arms and death.
Then they returned to Naesi and his queen,
Faint, wading through the blood themselves had
shed.

And now the feeble morning in the east
Began to break and spread a glimmering ray
Of dim grey light on dead and dying men,
And yet the sons of Usnach held the house.

Then Conor called his Druids, men of skill
To work enchantments, and he promised them

With many oaths, and great assurances,
And reasons, and asseverations loud,
That he would never hurt one single hair
Upon the sons of Usnach, if but once
They were delivered safe into his hands.
And also he persuaded them, for there
Was never since King Conor's day a man
At once so false and plausible, a man
Who made the men who knew him trust him, who
Deceived the men who trusted him, and yet
Made the deceived to trust him once again.
And this it was that brought the 'Druids' curse
(Because he made them act, deceiving them)
On green Emania and the proud Red Branch
Until they crumbled into dust away.
Who may withstand through time a 'Druid's curse!

But now they, trusting him, began in haste
To weave their arts and cast enchantments up,
And work with magic, and send forth a great
And weakening spell around the Red Branch House.
For when the sons of Usnach saw the dawn
And sallied forth with Déirdre in their midst,
They met the spell slow working through the air.
And yet they clove their way through Conor's troops,
Like three great hawks amid a flock of birds,
Who shooting on them in their might, will break
In twenty smaller flights the numerous flock.

Then when they thought to have indeed escaped
 And scattered all their foes, and made a safe
 And fortunate retreat, the cursed spell
 Began to act upon them; for they thought
 That all the air was water, and that they
 Were swimming forward through a liquid sea
 Which washed around them as they went: they let
 Their arms drop down, both sword, and shield and
 spear,

And spread their hands abroad and thought to swim,
 And battled with the air till they were faint.
 Then Conor's soldiers came without a blow
 And took and bound the three, and brought them
 bound

Before King Conor, and his heart rejoiced
 To see his wiles successful at the end,
 And those he hated placed within his power.
 Like as an old grey wolf rejoices when
 He marks a fleecy sheep from day to day,
 But cannot get her, she is guarded well;
 If it should haply chance that of a night
 She is not folded up within her pen
 He springs upon her in a lonely place,
 Exulting, and her flesh is very sweet:
 So Conor now exulted, and the sight
 Was very sweet unto him, and he gave
 Command to strike without delay the heads

From off the sons of Usnach where they stood ;
But Déirdre he reserved unto himself.

Yet in his army was there not a man
Would do his bidding on the royal three,
But one alone, he was a rugged man
From far-off Norway, and his father dear,
And brothers both by Naesi had been slain.
A thrill of joy came over him to see
The slayer of his father in his power,
And forth he stood to do the king's command.

Then Ardan pleaded: "Let him slay me first,
I am the youngest, and would gladly go
Before my brothers to the realm of death
To join the dusky army of the dead,
Nor see their blood poured forth before mine own."

And Airlé also said: "Slay me the first,
I may not see my brother's life-blood stream."

Then Naesi spoke, and all men looked on him,
With pity some, and some inspired with awe,
He seemed so high and noble in that hour.
His raven tresses now were streaming wild
About his shoulders, matted all with blood,
And streaks of blood beflecked his forehead white,
And trickled down his cheek, not ruddy now,
And yet not blanched, but pale and resolute.
He looked as one looks face to face with Death,
The lightning lurked within his dark eyes still ;

And sympathy at once and horror stirred
In every breast: and had he made appeal
To those who knew him, and who loved him well,
And urged his claim on life, not all the dread
That Conor had inspired in his chiefs,
Nor all the high authority that girds
The kingly office, had availed the king
To set the grisly chalice of revenge
Full with their life blood to his hungry lips;
For not a man but had forbidden it,
Though at the peril of his own dear soul.
But Naesi stooped not to demand his life,
And in the greatness of his pride he said:
"We three have run together through the day,
And faced the brunt of tempests and of waves,
And braved the fury of the angry sky;
Now let the wing of all-prevailing Death
At once close over us, the shade of Night
Fall on us all together; hand in hand
We go to join the army of the dead.
Take this my sword—Manannan, son of Lir,
Gave it to me—it does not mar its work.
Sever the three heads at a single blow."

Then the Norwegian took it at his word,
And each man held his breath and turned aside.
They stretched their necks together and the stroke
Descended on them like a flash of light,

And Usnach's golden children were no more.

Then a great cry of lamentation broke
And rent the air and mingled with the heavens,
And not an eye was dry, and not a tongue
But had a curse for Conor's cruelty.

There, where their blood was spilt they raised the
sod

And hollowed out for them a resting place,
Fair in the middle of the dewy lawn,
Where all the year upon the grassy slope
The sun pours down a flood of warmth and love.
And Déirdre came above them where they lay
Placed side by side as they had stood in life,
Reclining on their shields, their bloody arms
Laid by their side, as though they should awake
And rise to deeds of valour once again.

She had beheld them in their single death,
Listened to Naesi as he spoke his last,
Saw how their warm young blood had spurted forth,
And how men laid them in their silent grave;
Yet not a cry had burst upon her lips,
Nor tear had started in her fixed eye,
Nor moan had broken through her heaving breast.
Now like a ghost she moved, a ghost who comes
After long years and centuries of night
To visit earth once more—so did she come.

She too was flecked with blood, with Naesi's blood,
Her robe was reddened with it, and her eyes
Were fixed and motionless, and men who saw
Shuddered to look upon her beauty then,
Close by the open grave she stood and gazed,
Gazed on the forms she loved so well in life,
As though she would have looked for evermore.
But when she saw the sword Manannan gave,
The sword she had so often girt for him,
Placed in the hand that ne'er should wield it more,
The death-cold hand so often pressed in hers,
Her tears began, first silently, to flow,
Then in a torrent, and she lived again.
And all men wept to see her, and the drops
Stood in the eyes of weather-beaten chiefs
Who listened as she mourned above the grave.

"Ochone," she cried, "my light of life is gone,
And I am dark and desolate, the sun
That lights the world can dart no light to me;
My sun is set, and gone for evermore.
My Naesi, all my brothers, all I loved,
All that I lived for, they are gone from me.
The three who turned the battle's stormy tide
Who never blanched at any form of fate,
The Falcons of the cliffs of Asaroe,
The Eagles of the mountain are no more.
Oh, I was oft in solitudes, and oft

In lonely places where the foot of man
Came never near me, but I never was
Nor knew myself alone until to-day.
Oh, Naesi, how I loved thee, never man
Was loved by woman as thou wast by me;
There never broke from thee one hasty word,
No look impatient flashed into thine eye,
No thought unkind was ever on thy lip,
Nor anger in thy voice, but kindliness
For all mankind, and gentleness for me,
And perfect love and true nobility.
I never grieved because of thee, no pain,
No hurt, no sickness, no unhappiness,
Ever took hold upon me, when with thee.
No moon was long, no day was dark or slow,
No hour was dull, but like a happy dream
Time passed beside me when I was with thee.
The props of battle all are fallen, and he
The mightiest, the greatest, is cast down.
Yon blue-green javelin he cast so oft,
Shall never vibrate in his hand again.
He seized upon my early dawn of love,
And now my love is stronger than my life.
Let them not think that I shall live, when they
Are not upon the hills to comfort me.
These three great golden-studded shields that lie
Beside them in their sleep of death were mine,

A royal couch whereon I often slept,
And where I think to sleep another sleep,
A deeper and a longer than before.
Your blood-stained tyrant, murderer of men,
Your Conor has no power upon me now.
I am the lonely apple on the tree,
The cluster all is fallen, and I am left,
The fibres snap that hold me; thus I shake
And tremble fast upon the withered stem,
And quit my hold upon it—see, I fall
Down from this cold and dismal bough of Life.”

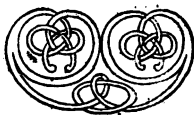
Even as she spoke she fell, her heart-strings snapt,
And Death had over-mastered her. She fell
Into the grave where Naesi lay and slept.
There at his side the child of Félim fell,
The fair-haired daughter of an hundred smiles.
Men piled their grave and reared their stone on high,
And wrote their names in Ogam. So they lay
All four united in the dream of death.

These were the deaths for which the child unborn

Had cause to curse King Conor, this the blood
That swelled into a sea and overflowed
The pleasant plains of Ulster. 'Twas for this
Emania fell with all her palaces,
It was for this the fair Red Branch was hewn

From off the tree of Ulster, fruit and leaves.

But Fergus' war with Conor, and the blood
He shed in Ulster to avenge their fate
And the wrong done him, and the aid he got
From Mève, the queen—I shall not tell it here,
For that belongeth to the Wars of Mève.—
Thus far the fate of Usnach's sons—thus far.





the children of lir.

THE cold and cruel fate that overtook
The children of the great De Danann, Lir,
Is of the Sorrow-stories of our isle.
It is the saddest and the softest tale
That ever harper harped, or wordful bard
With union assonance and fall of tone,
Marking the marvel of his honey verse
With lines of long alliterative words,
And sweet compacted syllables, and feet
Increasing upon feet, e'er framed in song.
The sorrow-tale indeed is old and young,
Old, for so many hundred years have gone
Since last beneath the midnight shimmering star
Was heard the music of the birds of snow.
Young, for amid the bright-eyed tuneful Gael
The sorrows of the snowy-breasted four
Are told again to-day, and shall be told
Long as the children of Millesius last

To people Banba's hills and pleasant vales.

Alas, those days of blood and broken arms,
When first the thunderclap of shouting war
Burst on the proud secure De Danann race,
When Tailltin's plains of emerald felt the first
Red stain imprinted on their velvet sward!
From the stark blow of the Milesian glaive
The great De Danann chiefs at first drew back,
But soon took courage, and in conclave met,
Summoned a council to elect a king.
Lest broken up in petty sovereignties,
Each following his own immediate lord
And working for himself (as heretofore
When all was rest, security and peace)
The old De Danann race should crumble down,
Or, bit by bit, should melt away before
These newly come Milesian men of war.
So they elected there the Dagda's son
Bove Derg, he was a brother to the fair
And subtle chieftain, Angus of the Boyne.
But Lir, who hoped that he himself should be
Their choice in that convention, was passed by,
And not elected: chafing in his soul
He would not reverence the new-made king,
But forth he strode in deep disdain, and sought
His seat Shée Finnaha: and there remained,

Not paying homage to the chosen prince,
And yet not warred against, for he was strong :
And the De Danann men were ever wise
And would not risk their unity by war.
Thus, not submitting nor rebelling, Lir
Remained at peace a space, until his wife
Died stricken with sore illness. Sorrow then
Seized on his heart and all men pitied him ;
And over Erin there was much lament,
For she was known to many, and who knew
Loved her, and grieved for her ; thus many mourned.

Then said the king : "Lo! Lir is waxen weak
That was so strong. He is, and well may be,
Broken at heart, for he has lost the prop
That most sustained him, and I know he fain
Would have my friendship, as I also his.
Now must he seek again another wife,
And I shall offer him the loveliest
Of all my foster-daughters, Ara's girls,
Aév, Eefi, Elva—all are passing fair.

The grave De Dananns praised the prudent speech
So wisely uttered, and took thought, and sent
An embassy to Lir, to offer him
The friendship of the king, and choice of wives
Amongst the foster daughters of his hall.
Then Lir at last is comforted, and lays
His grief aside, and leaves his home and comes

With fifty chariots in his company,
To the great lake by Kil-da-lua; there
Bove Derg now reigned within his lime-white hall.
But when he came the king was very glad,
And met him, and they pledged a friendship true,
And all rejoiced, for Lir was loved by all.
Yea by the king himself was he esteemed,
For the De Dananns knew that he was true,
Having a single heart in all his ways,
That ever spoke his feelings in his face.
So the king sent the wine-cup round the board
For all to drink to Lir, and Lir rejoiced.
There by the queen, their foster-mother, sat
Three maidens, sisters, out of Ara's Isle,
Three maidens very lovely to behold.
To Lir was given choice of all the three.
"All are most beautiful," said he, "but all
To me alike unknown, the eldest then
Should be the noblest, she shall be my queen."
'Aév is the eldest," said the king, "and she
Shall be thy wife," so she was given him.
Then with immeasurable merriment,
And jubilation and feasting were they both
Espoused. They twain continued there a while
Living 'mid much rejoicing, till at length,
Their feasting o'er, they turned and hand in hand
Sought once again Lir's seat Shee Finnaha,

Regretted of the king and loved of all.

There the first year she bore him children twain,
Finnuala a daughter, Ae a son,

Both at a birth ; and in the second year

Two sons named Fíachra and Conn, and died.

Then surely Lir had died along with her
From anguish at his loss, but that his love
For the four children helped to make him bear
The burden of his life. But when the king
And all his household heard that Aév was dead,
They raised three loud commiserating cries
Of woe for Lir and for themselves. Yet soon
The king took thought and said: "we shall not
lose

Despite this death our friendship with great Lir.

Not yet is our alliance closed, for now

Our second foster-daughter shall we give

If it so be that she replace to Lir

The wife that he has lost." And all approved.

So word was sent to Lir to come again

And take another wife, and leave his grief.

But Lir rejoiced on hearing it, and came.

Then the king gives, to comfort him, the fair
Daughter of Oilíoll out of Ara's Isle,
Eefi, his second foster-daughter dear.
They were united both, and feasted there
A space together, and at length returned.

Then Lir and Eefi lived for many years
In peace and happiness, without a care,
Without anxiety, without regret.
All the four children lived along with them,
And grew from day to day in loveliness,
In grace of gesture, in nobility.
And Eefi loved them well, for of her own
She had no children, and the gracious king
Cherished them all, as though they were his own.
He many times a year came down to see
His four young saplings, growing tall and fair.
Also the chiefs of the De Danann race
Whene'er they came to Lir to celebrate
The Feast of Age (that ancient banquet long
Established by Manamnan son of Lir,
Which in each other's mansions turn by turn
It was their rule each year to celebrate)
Would wonder at the children, and admire
Their growing beauty and their gracefulness.
They marked with joy Finnuala, for she
Was of surpassing excellence of form,
With rounded shoulders, white and fair and smooth,
Such as no artist ever smoothed the like,
Polishing slowly with excess of work
A disk of ivory to make it shine.
And all her brothers were as beautiful,
With bright blue eyes and silky golden hair

That fell upon their shoulders and hung down
Far on their back. Upon their young fresh cheeks
The ruddy glow of health smiled out beneath
The laughing eyes. Joy spoke upon their lips,
And all their limbs were comely, fair and straight,
And all their words were full of graciousness,
Of gaiety, of goodness; and their voice
Was very sweet to hear, and oft men said
It was as good to listen to their tones
As to a fairy music. So the chiefs
Praised them and looked with pleasure on the four,
And never finished wondering; to see
How every year but added some new grace
Or some new fairness, and took nought away.
But Lir their father loved them with a love
Exceeding that of fathers, for his soul
Was fixed upon his children, close bound up
With all his laughing four. And every night
He watched them as they lay in slumber deep;
And every morning at the dawn of day
Would leave his couch to seat him self beside
The couches of his children, there to talk
And fondle them, and glory in himself
At having four such children; for he thought
That never yet since Banba was an isle
Had father four such children. And not he
Thought this alone, all thought it and all said.

So for a time the years went floating by
As light as feathers wafted on the wind,
Leaving behind no furrow track of care,
And sending down no burden as they went
To bow the back of Lir or of his folk.
For had he lived his life in Tír-na-n-óg,
The smiling land where even age is young,
The days could not have passed more happily.
But so they were not destined to remain,
For Eefi—both their aunt and stepmother—
Most beautiful herself, and until now
Courtied and flattered by the chiefs, began
To feel that as the children grew, men's eyes
Rested upon them more and more, while she
Who had been as the moon which every eye
Seeks when it first begins to mount, was now
But as a star among the other stars,
And losing what they gained. Then though at first
She had her sister's children loved as though
The four had been her own—for she had none—
Yet when she saw all others love them too,
She felt her own love first begin to thaw
(In spite of her, for yet she wished it not)
And then wax cold and colder. Not at first
But very slowly, did it turn to hate.
At last the poison plant of jealousy
Began to strike a root within her heart

And torture it, and grow and ever grow,
And like a rankling cancer feed on it,
Until her healthy thoughts were turned to gall,
Till all things looked most horrid to her eye,
And every idle space within her mind
Was filled with hate, her blood flowed slow for
hate,
And hate was like a fire within her brain.

For a whole year her torture grew so fierce,
Her jealousy so bitter, and so keen
The pangs that preyed upon her own proud heart,
That from her couch she never raised herself.
But plotting mischief and consumed with pain,
Filled full of spite and bitter enmity,
She lay and meditated evil things,
She brooded on her old enchanted lore
Which she had learned in Ara's sea-beat isle,
And counted words, and thought of sentences,
And recollected spells, and muttered low,
And fostered into life a hundred charms
That, half-forgotten, lurked within her mind,
These she had buried there when as a girl
She practised them upon the great lone rocks
Black with the gloom of ages, rocks that rise
Into the sky to be a lofty home
For screaming eagles, and to front the roar
And angry onset of a million waves

Out from that great wild sea without a shore.
There on the cliffs, around whose hollow base
The billows burst in thunder, and the foam
Shot up in gusty showers to the air,
She oft had worked with magic and with charms,
And now she called them to her mind again.
A whole long year she lay upon her couch
And eat away her life in bitterness
Seeking a remedy, but finding not.
At length the bridle of her self-restraint
Gave way before that slow and deadly strain.
She rose, death gleaming in her evil eye,
And spake to Lir, "I will go see again
The king my foster father, and will take
His children to him." But she meant them woe.
Finnuala alone was loath to leave
Her father Lir, because she dreaded ill,
Fearing her stepmother, for she had dreamt
A dreadful dream of terror, and was pale
And sick at heart and fearful. But the rest
Began to urge her much to go with them,
And when she saw that she could not prevail
With her entreaties, and that they would go
Despite her warning, then she would not leave
Her brothers dear alone, but went with them.
Full of a dim foreboding—yet she went:

Now when Shee Finnaha was left behind

Far out of sight, and half their journey o'er,
Eefi drew out a keen sharp-pointed sword
Which she had hidden with her, and she thought
To slay the children there. But when she saw
Their calm confiding faces, and their eyes
Dilated wide with wonderment to see
The demon that was raging in her own,
She could not do it; and her woman's heart
Failed her, for all her muscles were relaxed
With horror at the thing that she would do.
And though she wished she could not give the blow,
But from her hand the gleaming weapon fell
Out of the chariot, yet she halted not,
Nor gave command to pick it up again.
So they pursued their road of fear until
They reached Lake Darvra's shore, and there the
steeds

Smoking and weary were at last unyoked
To eat and rest. But Eefi took the four
Down to the margin of the pleasant lake
And bade them swim and wash away the dust
After the tedious journey. Then the four
Entered the clear cool water of the lake,
And bathed rejoicing in its bright blue wave
After the heat and dust, and splashed themselves,
Laughing to see the ripples form in rings
And creep away from them at every move.

Watching the dimpling waters come and go,
They half forgot the terrors of the day.
But Eefi from the bank struck with a wand
Each of the four, and sudden at the stroke
Their fair white limbs, rounded, elastic, smooth,
Shrank and contracted; and the baleful blow
Made from their snow-white, ivory-smooth skin
Down to start out and feathers, for their arms
Marbled with veins of blue, fell into wings,
Of long white feathers, folded by their sides,
And all their delicate and tender feet
Were changed to coarse brown webs, their necks
grew long,
And in a moment where four human forms
Had sported in the water, lo, four swans,
Snow-white, full-plumed and slender necked, that swam
Backwards and forwards, graceful, with bright eyes!
Then Eefi looking on them, felt her hate
Assuage a little in her breast. "Go now,"
She said, "ye swans, go and consort with birds,
And dive and swim with clangorous sea fowl,
And fish from shore to shore, your friends may weep
But cannot rescue you, your fate is fixed."
Then were the swans all dazed and motionless,
And turned their great black eyes upon themselves,
And stirred not, out of wonderment and fear.
At length Finnualla began to speak

And all her words came clear as heretofore :

"Oh, Eefi, great and evil is thy deed.

Thy friendship was a treachery. But our friends
Shall surely find thee in thy guiltiness.

Eefi, thy doom shall be far worse than ours."

And then she ceased, but from her great black eyes
The tears fell down. Yet soon she spake again.

"Oh, let us hear how long shall we be swans,
That we may know beforehand when our doom
Shall have an ending. Eefi tell us this."

Then Eefi said, "I would Finnuale

Thou hadst for thine own sake not questioned me.
Three hundred years on smooth Lake Darvra's shore
It is your doom to spend. Three hundred years
Upon the sea of Moyle, and yet again
Three hundred years upon the western sea
By wind-swept wave-beat Erris Downann's coasts,
Until the Princess of the South shall wed
A Prince from out the North, until shall come
The Tailcinn into Erin, teaching things
We never heard before. Until shall sound
The first clear tone of Christian bell ; till then
Your doom is fixed, and neither your own power
Nor mine, nor all the powers of your friends
Can aught avail you ; not though all the men
Of Erin or the world should cast about
To free you or to save you. Over you

There hangs an endless weary load of years."
Then half relentful spake she yet again.
"Nought can I help you now, your doom is fixed,
And yet this boon I grant you—to retain
Your own sweet Gaelic speech, that ye may be
Able to sing a sweet and plaintive strain
Of fairy music, able to excel
The music of the world, and lull to sleep
The souls of all who hear. Ye shall retain
Your human reason, and ye shall not grieve
At this your change into the form of swans."

Then Eefi gave command to yoke her steeds
And so departed on her wicked way,
Leaving the swans upon the lake. The four
Swam to and fro, and uttered bitter cries.

But when she reached the palace of the king,
Her foster father, then he questioned her
Why she was come and had not brought with her
Lir's children. But she answered him that Lir
Loved him not now as heretofore, and would
No longer trust his children to his care.
Then he, amazed and fearful, sent with speed
Messengers northward to Shee Finnaha,
Asking to have the children sent to him.
But Lir was filled with fear and much dismay,
And dark foreboding, and he hastened forth

With his attendants, and he drove as swift
As are the winds of March, until he reached
Lake Darvra's pleasant shore. The four white swans
Were swimming up and down upon the lake
And oaring with their feet, to overcome
The cold resistance of the lapping waves,
Which wearied all their young and tender limbs,
Unused to such a strain: and as they swam
They saw Lir's chariot, and Finnuala
Spake to the others: "Lo, I see a gleam
Of spears and shields. I hear the thundering
Of many horses, and the helmets glance
Bright in the sun. I know that this must be
Our father with his people, and he comes
To seek his children who shall never more
Fall on his neck again, ah, woe is me!
Let us approach and speak and welcome him."

Then Lir much marvelled when he heard the
sounds

Of human speech arise from four white swans,
And drawing near he asked them whence it was
They spake with human voices, being birds.
Then cried Finnuala: "Come hither Lir,
We are thy children, Lir, we are thy four.
Eefi has changed us into swans." Then Lir
Stood for a time as one who has been stunned,
And all his people raised three long loud cries

Of grief and lamentation, till the woods
Quivered to hear the long-drawn cry of pain.
Then at the last Lir asked if any means
Could bring them to their rightful shapes again.
Answered Finnuala: "There is no hope,
No help, no consolation for us four,
Until a Prince from out the North shall wed
A Princess from the South, until there come
The Tailcinn into Erin teaching things
We never heard before, until there sound
The first clear tone of Christian bell (whate'er
The Christian bell may be), so long we must
Be in the form of swans—so Eefi said."

And then again the people raised three cries
Of grief and misery, until the fowl
Rose frightened from the reeds, until the fish
Darted below the surface far away,
And the trees trembled through their inmost leaves.
And then again said Lir: "Yet come to land
Ye have your reason and your own sweet speech,
O come to me once more, and speak with me,
And gladden me again, and leave me not."

"Alas, we cannot go with thee again,
We cannot leave the lake where now we are,
We cannot live amongst you any more.
Yet have we reason, and our Gaelic speech,
And power to chant a plaintive fairy strain

So sweet that those who hear us would not wish
For greater happiness. Remain to-night
Beside the lake and we shall sing for you."

Then Lir and all his people left their steeds
And drew anigh the shore, and held their breath
While from the bosom of the placid lake
There rose beneath the still clear sky, afire
With all the lights of sunset, such a strain
As never had been heard on earth before.
The liquid notes gushed in a golden stream
Into the sky and flooded Darvra's shores
With heavenly harmony, and all the air
Grew heavy with the lingering liquid sound.
The coot within the reeds forgot to cry,
The lark left singing of her evening song,
Poised in the air she listened, and the thrush
Ceased from his carol on the greenwood bough.
Some said an eagle wheeling in the clouds
Paused in his spiral circles and alit
Amid the listening men. The bright-backed fish
Lay on the water overhead to drink
That strange new sound. And over Lir there stole
A sadness without pain, a soft regret
That brought no pang with it, and as the notes
Fell one by one on his entranced ear,
His painless sorrow seemed to lose its shape,
Till vague regret became an ecstasy,

And over all his senses stole a strange
Voluptuous longing, and it lulled his heart
And soothed his throbbing pulse, and calmed at once
All the unrestful blood within his veins.
And as he lay and listened, note by note
Stole to his heart and melted it, until
Forgetfulness came over him. His eyes
Closed and he slept as sleep the happy dead.
And all his people at the magic notes
Were cast into a slumber full of bliss.
This was the swans' first singing, and the four
Rejoiced to hear themselves and know their power.

But when the morrow with its full delight
Rose on all people, and the sun stood high,
Then Lir at last awoke, and called to mind
His children, and remembered they were birds.
And yet, so magical had been their song
That so remembering, he felt no pain,
And waking woke not to unhappiness.
There by the shore were paddling the white swans
Waiting to greet him e'er he left the lake.
And there he parted with them for a time,
And spake to each a separate farewell.
Then moving swiftly southward, he arrived
Before the palace of the king, Bove Derg.
There the king met him, Eefi at his side,

And chid him that the children were not there.
"Oh, King," cried Lir, "it is your foster child,
The sister of their mother, Eefi here,
Who has played treachery upon them all,
And changed them by her devilish art to swans.
They four are swimming on Lake Darvra now."
Then the king looked on Eefi, and she blenched
And shrank before his eye, and so the king
Read in her face that Lir had spoken true,
And with fierce looks and gleaming eyes he cried:
"The wicked thing which thou hast done, shall fall
Far heavier on thee thyself, than on
Our four dear children, for their suffering
Shall have an end, thy pain shall know of none.
Of all the creatures that are on the earth,
Or all the things above the earth, or all
The shapes beneath the earth, which is the most
Abhorred of thy soul, which darest thou?"

And pallid Eefi screamed, "I fear to be
A Demon of the Air, that most of all."
Then cried the angry king: "Air Demon be,"
And with his rod of magic striking her
(Because the great De Danann kings are all
Powerful men of magic, very skilled)
He changed her to a Demon of the Air,
And with a shriek she spread her wings and shot
Up from the earth away into the clouds

To wander through infinity of space.
And she is still a Demon of the Air,
Wheeling and screaming round the universe,
And shall be so till time shall cease to be.

Thereafter came the king himself and Lir
And many people in their company
Unto Lake Darvra, where the four white swans
Were swimming on the water. And they made
A great encampment there, and every night
The swans would sing for them, and every day
The king and Lir, and many noble chiefs
Of the De Danann race, would come to them,
And hold sweet converse with them all day long.
And the Milesian people also came
From every part of Erin, and they made
Another great encampment by the lake.
And they and the De Dananns mingled there
And quite forgot their rivalry, for hate
And jealousy, and evil thoughts, and all
Anger, and sense of loneliness, and dread
Of future days, and all despondency,
And fear of death, and gloominess of mind,
And all repining at old age, and all
Heaviness of the heart, with every cause
That makes the soul of man dejected, these
Vanished before the singing of the swans.

So both the races walked in amity.
And the historians tell us notes so sweet,
Able to charm away the care of men
And soothe them into slumber, were not heard
Since Erin was an isle, nor shall be heard
While the four seas shall flow around her shores.

So the De Dananns and Milesians stayed
In their encampments, and the swans remained
Upon the lake, and night by night they sang.
But every day they spent in converse sweet
With those around them, till three hundred years
Were numbered. Then there came at last a day
When to her side Finnuala recalled
Her brothers, and they marvelled when they saw
That she was weeping; but she spake and said:
"My brothers dear, a happy time was ours
Upon these pleasant waters, with our friends
And kindred near us, but three hundred years,
The first three hundred years are over now,
And there remains no other day but one
For us upon Lake Darvra. We must go."
Then an exceeding sorrow fell upon
The sons of Lir, because their time had been
A time of gladness to them on the lake,
Among their friends and kindred, spreading joy
Through all men with their singing. Much they feared
To go to solitudes remote from men,

To places far away, unknown to them,
The gloomy and tempestuous sea of Moyle.

Then for the last last time they drew anigh
The margin of the pleasant lake, and spoke
Unto their father Lir, and to their friends,
And told them they must go far far away
Into the northern sea, the bleak cold Moyle,
To live for ages tossing on its breast.

Then spreading wide their strong white wings,
the swans

Rose off the water in the sight of all,
Beating the air beneath them, till at length
The men of Erin saw them but as specks
High overhead. And there they paused a space
Poising themselves upon their snowy wings,
And looking downward on their friends below.
Then for the north they started, flying straight;
And all men watched them till they passed from sight
And vanished utterly; and then there fell
A great distress and sadness over all,
So that the men of Erin made a law
From that day forth that none should kill a swan.

But when Lir's children reached the gloomy space
Where now their portion was allotted them,
And saw the rocky steep far-stretching coasts,
And looked upon the wild dark sea, and heard

The booming of the great salt waves, and felt
 The cold sea billows heaving under them,
 They feared exceedingly, and knew their plight
 Would be most wretched from that evil day.
 For they were torn with sorrow to have left
 Their father and their friends. And so they fared
 Enduring cold and hunger, buffeted
 By the great waves, in loneliness and grief.
 No human form approached to gladden them,
 No human voice made music in their ears.
 The sun rose up and set, and rose again,
 But brought nor comfort nor companionship
 On the void waters of the salt cold Moyle.

And then there came a day when through the sky
 The bleak clouds drove in columns, and the sun
 Was swallowed up behind them, and the wind
 Began to scream along the rising sea.
 Then cried Finnuala, "Alas for us,
 For we shall soon be sundered by the waves
 And—it may be—shall never meet again.
 Oh, if we can outlive this coming night,
 Dear brothers, let us choose a place to meet
 Once more together, that we be not lost."
 Then the three answered: "Wisely do you speak,
 Dear sister, let us choose the Rock Na Rone
 To be our meeting place if we survive."

Then the light failed, and all grew very black ;
And midnight came, and with it came the storm.
A cold wild wind swept down upon the sea,
The lightening shot along in sheets of fire,
The thunder crashed in one unceasing peal,
And from the open skies the driven rain
Fell slant upon the swans. The waves were now
No longer waves but mountains. When they rose
And the swans mounted on their angry crests,
They thought the stars must be within their reach.
And when they fell, down fell with them the swans,
Deafened and bruised and stunned. The cold salt
brine

A hundred times swept over them ; their feet
Grew numbed and faint, their wings were strained
and torn,
Their plumage drenched, their bodies bruised and
sore.

And still the great relentless waves came down,
Forcing the birds to meet them, and the rain
And spray and salt sea foam commingled swept
Cutting across the surface ; and the swans
Were scattered from each other far away,
Each battling for its life and each far more
Dead than alive, without a hope at last,
That any had survived except itself.
But with the morning light, the storm began

To sink a little, and the violence
Of the great crested waves grew less and less,
The cold rain ceased, and when the sun shone out,
The sea grew calmer. Then Finnuala
Oared to the Rock Na Rone with weary feet,
And fluttered to the summit, sore distressed,
Looking around her, but she could not see
Her brothers. Then her heart grew very faint
Because she thought that they were lost, and thought
She now must live for evermore alone,
Upon that weary waste of wintry sea.
Then she lamented with a loud lament
And sent her voice in grief across the waves.
But when the sun was high she looked again
And saw Conn swimming slowly towards the rock,
With his head drooping, and his plumage drenched.
Then she took heart again at sight of him
And welcomed him and set him at her side.
And next came Fiachra, but faint with cold,
Worn out with suffering, and stiff and sore,
Battered and beaten by the great salt waves,
And all his feathers draggled; and his wings
Painfully trailed behind him as he swam
With half the life crushed out of him. His voice
Failed him for weakness, when they spoke to him
He could not answer them for weariness.
Then brave Finnuala took each of them

Placing them by her, under either wing,
And cherished them, and comforted the pair,
Still waiting with unutterable fear
To see if Ae would come to them; and soon
She saw him also swimming towards the rock,
With head erect, and plumage firm and dry,
And she rejoiced exceedingly. But Ae
Nestled beside her, underneath her breast,
While both the others crept beneath her wings.
Then said Finnuala: "Ah, brothers dear,
Although we think this storm so terrible,
Yet many others lurk within the sky,
From this time forth, for shelter have we none."

So they continued amid rain and wind,
Hardship and hunger, till there came a night
In cold hard January, when a frost
Crept over earth and sea, and sent its tooth
Into the waters of the lonely bay
Where they were sleeping on the Rock Na Rone.
The crisp air bit and stung them, and the bay
Became a floor of ice, and e'er they felt
Their wings were frozen fast unto the rock,
And their web feet clung close and would not move.
A horrid fear came over them to find
That they were frost-bound to the iron rock,
And all day long they struggled to be free,
And battled with the stones, until the skin

Was torn from off their feet, nor did they wrench
Their bodies loose till all the frozen quills
And half the plumage of their tender breasts
Were left behind them in the nipping ice.
And all their feet and wings and breasts were left
Bleeding and open. Then Finnuala
Cried to her brothers, "piteous is our plight,
For we are under *geasa* not to leave
The sea of Moyle, but if we here remain,
The cold sharp brine shall enter at our wounds,
And we shall die with very pain of it."
Yet were they forced to swim away, far out
Into the sea-green current of the Moyle,
All torn and bleeding as they were, the brine
Was sharp and bitter, and it entered in
And cut and stung and scalded them, and yet
They bore it, for they were without relief.
Hence they remained beside the coast, as near
As they could come to it, for many months,
Until their wounds were healed, until the web
Grew on their feet again, and plumage new
Covered their poor scald breasts and wings once more.

And after this for many long, long years,
They swam from place to place, and sought the
coasts
Of Erin sometimes; sometimes they would seek

The headlands high of Alba—not for long—
For always they returned again to breast
The cold sea-current of the stormy Moyle.

And then again there came a day, as they
Were swimming near the outlet of the Bann,
Off the north coast of Erin, that they saw
A stately troop of horsemen come direct
From the south-west. They rode upon white steeds,
With coloured garments, and the sun shone bright,
Glinting upon their weapons as they came.
Then said the swans, "we will ashore and see
Whence is the cavalcade, and whether they
Be of our own De Danann race, or be
The proud new-come Milesians," so they swam
In to the shore. But when the strangers came
And saw the swans, they knew them and rejoiced,
For they were come to seek them. Both the sons
Of the De Danann king Bove Derg, were there,
Fergus, the chess-player, and Ae, the wit,
With many others of the Fairy Host.
These long had sought Lir's children round the
shores
Of Northern Erin, and had found them not.
And now they joyed exceedingly to see
That they were living, and they greeted them
With love and tenderness, and told them much
About their father and their other friends.

How they were well, and how the chiefs were now
Gathering to their home Shee Finnaha
To eat once more with Lir the Feast of Age;
Happy in all save in the thought of them,
And all their hardship on the cruel sea.
Then said Finnuala: "No tongue can tell,
No lips can utter, and no thought of man
Can sound the sufferings we have endured,
Since last we sang to you beside the shore
Of pleasant Darvra," and she chanted this:

"Pleasant is the place of Lir to-day,
Many mighty goblets mixed of mead
Circle round about his banquet board:
Ah! we saw them circling long ago,
In the years we yearn for; when we ate
Clothed in cramosie and cloth of gold,
Midst the quaffing quaighs of mellow mead—
Thence to softly sleep on silken beds.—
Now the sea-weed salt and bitter brine,
And the sea-shore sand is all our share,
And for beds the bald unbending rocks.
Weary are the hours we wear away
Breasting breakers, battling with the brine,
Brooding on the bald unbending rocks."

So sang Finnuala, and all were sad
At that sad singing. But at last they took
A fond and long farewell, because it was

Forbidden to the swans to linger there,
From off the sea of Moyle. This was the last
They saw of their De Danann friends, and much
The memory of it soothed and gladdened them.
But these returned unto Shee Finnaha
And told to Lir and the De Danann chiefs
The sorrows of the swans: and Lir grew sick
And sore at heart to think of them, but yet
He could not succour them. And so the birds
Remained upon that stormy strip of sea
Three hundred years, until their time was come
To leave it, and Finnuala was glad,
And told the others, and they all rejoiced.

Then they rose up and beat the air, and flew
South-westward, and they left that dreary coast
Far, far behind them: and they never paused
But came to Erris Downann and the sea
Around the Isle of Glora, where the wave
Out of the boundless ocean in the West,
Falls thundering upon the groaning shore.
Nor were they aught the better for the change.

There they remained and suffered much from
storm,
And much from cold: They were in sorer straight
Than they had been before, because they found
Small shelter from the beating of the sea.

And there it was that Aivric met with them ;
He was the owner of a tract of land
Skirting the sea. It chanced that of a day
He visited this land of his, and heard
A strange and plaintive music in the air,
And a low sob that ran along the sea.
And much he marvelled at it, but at length
He saw the swans, and heard them speaking words
Amongst themselves, and singing soft and low.
But then he marvelled more to hear sweet sounds
Of human speech from birds, and oft would come
To listen to their singing, and at last
He cast aside his fear and spake to them
From off the shore. And then the swans were glad
And gently swam to land, and answered him.
And so they fell in converse, for his words
Were mild and gentle, and he pleased the birds
Exceedingly. He loved them, and they loved
Him also, and he brought his friends with him
To come and hear them. Know that it was he
Who first arranged this story, hearing it
From the four swans themselves. He set it down
As I have told it to you, word by word.

But now their miseries commenced again
And winter brought them woe. There came a night
When all the surface of the cold salt sea

From Erris Downann unto Achill's Isle
Was frozen in a solid rock of ice.
And then there rose a biting north-west wind
That drove along the surface cutting sleet,
Intolerably cold. And soon it seemed
To the three brothers that they could no more
Bear up against their hardships, and they cried
Aloud with bitter pitiable cries.
Nor could Finnualla do anything
To give them peace or comfort; for the more
She tried to comfort them so much the more
They groaned aloud. Then her own heart began
To break within her, for she was out-worn
And overcome with cold. She also mourned
Lamenting with the others; for the sleet
Like grains of iron seemed to pierce and bite
Her very heart, quite blinding her: and so
She moaned with quick sharp moans, until at last
God heard her cry. He pitied her and sent
A light into her soul, because He saw
The utter anguish of her misery,
That it could be no greater than it was.
Then all her soul was filled, as with a light
And she cried out aloud: "Dear brothers, now
Something has touched me. Oh, believe with me
In the great God, the God of truth, who made
The earth with all its fruits, who made the sea

Teeming with wonders. Put your trust in Him,
For He shall give you help, and comfort you."
Then they all answered: "We believe in Him."
Then said Finnuuala, "I too believe
In God who is most perfect, and knows all."

Thus at the destined hour they all believed,
And the good Lord of heaven sent them help,
And brought them comfort, so that neither cold
Nor storm nor hunger hurt them any more
While they continued on that barren coast.
Thus they remained upon the western sea
Till their appointed years had been fulfilled.

And now Finnuuala proclaimed once more:
"Dear brothers, joy with me! our weary time
At last is finished. Up! and let us seek
Our father and our people once again.
Oh, they will marvel when they see us come,
My plumage swells for utter happiness."
Then were they all exceeding glad at heart,
And lightly rose from off the sunny face
Of the blue sea. Toward the east they flew
Filled high with hope and joy, and buoyed aloft
With pleasant memories of other days,
With fond anticipations, and the bliss
Of sweet expectancy. The morning sun
Shone glinting on their pinions as they flew.

But when they reached Shée Finnaha, ah then
There was no Lir to welcome them, no chiefs
Of the De Dananns ; not a trace of life
Among the ruins of their childhood's home.
All, all, was desolate. Around the walls
The ivy hung ; the roof was overthrown,
And the green grass was growing in the hall.
Forests of rank grey nettles sprouted round
The long deserted ruins, and the moss
Clung closely to the fallen scattered stones.
There was nor fire, nor hearth, nor herd, nor stall,
Nor trace of habitation : all was bare
And all was still and all was desolate.

Then the four swans gathered together close
And cried three cries, more bitter than the wail
Wrung from them once upon the western sea,
For they were wild with grief, and stunned and dazed.
And sick at heart Finnuala made moan,
"Sore the wonder to behold our home
Roofless ruins, weeds upon the wall,
Neither steed in stall, nor hound on hearth ;
Ladies' laughter doth not echo there ;
There is heard no harp, no song, no sound,
There is seen no sport, no spear, no shield ;
Sore the wonder to behold our home."

There by the ruinous deserted place
Of their forefathers, where they once had dreamt

The happy dream of youth's young days, they lay
That dreary night and sent their cries to heaven,
Or chanted sad low melting fairy strains.

Thence flying westward with the dawn of day
They 'lit upon a little lake beside
The wild sea-coast, and there began to sing
So sweetly that the birds around the shores
Gathered together to the water's edge:
And all the sea-fowl came, and all the flocks
That heard the music (as they passed o'erhead
Winging their way unto the marshy ground
Their wonted feeding place) descended straight
And crowded on the shore to hear them sing.
From this the little lake was called of men
The "island of the bird flocks."

But the swans

During the day would take their flight to seek
For food along the coasts, or wing their way
To Iniskea, where stands upon one leg
The lonely crane that never had a mate,
But lives companionless, that never left
The island from the day the earth was made,
And shall not leave till earth shall cease to be.
Betimes they flew to Achill, and betimes
Unto the cliffs of Doon, and all along
The western headlands seeking for their food:
But every night they would return to rest

Unto the little lake in Glora's isle.

Thus then they lived till holy Patric came
Bringing pure faith to Erin—lived until
St. Keesvog came to Inisglora's shore.

Now the first night this holy man of God
Came thither seeking for the sons of Lir,
At early matin time, when all was still,
And the four swans upon the little lake
Were sleeping all together, with their heads
At rest beneath their wings, they heard his bell
Sound faintly in the distance, ringing low.
Then they all trembled greatly at the sound,
And started from their slumber, fluttering
Across the lake, and fearing, for the tone,
Was strange and dreadful to them, and it filled
Their breasts with terror. But Finnuala
Was not afraid, she soothed their minds and said:
"Know you, my brothers, what this sound may be?"
"We hear," they said, "a faint and fearful voice
That thrills us through and through. We do not know
What is the cause of it, or whence it be."
Then said Finnuala, "the end is near
It is the music of the Christian bell,
And now our sufferings shall surely cease.
And God who knows shall break the ancient spell."
Soon were the brothers calm again, and all
Remained and listened till the bell had ceased

To toll across the waters faint and low.
Then said Finnuala, "now let us sing
Our music also," and they chanted all
A strain of fairy music soft and sweet.
And Keevog heard it, even where he stood,
And wondered at it, for he knew not whence
It came, or who was singing it. But soon
It was revealed to him that they who sang
Were Lir's four children, and his soul was glad,
Because it was to seek them he had come.

So when the morning broke he reached the lake
And saw the four birds swimming there, and asked,
"Are ye Lir's children whom I come to seek?"
"We are Lir's children, we were changed to swans
By our own mother's sister long ago."
"I thank the God of heaven," said Keevog then,
"That I have found you. Ye shall come with me,
And God shall break your chain of spells at last."
Thereat rejoiced, they came unto the shore
And gave themselves into his care. The saint
Sent for a skilled artificer and caused
Two thin bright chains of silver to be made,
One chain to couple Conn and Fiachra,
And one between Finnuala and Ae.

So there the four swans lived, and hour by hour
They listened to the saint and talked with him,
And learned of him, and the holy man

Loved them with all his heart, and taught them much,
And they were his delight. Also the four
Were very happy ; and the memory
Of all the misery they had endured
And their long life of labour and distress
Began to be effaced ; and so they lived.

It chanced that Largnean, son of Colman, ruled
In those days over Connacht, and his queen
Was Decca, she was daughter of the king
Of southern Munster, Finnin ; it was she
Whom Eefi named the Princess of the South.
And Decca heard about the magic swans
Who sang sweet music, and her learned men
Told her their history, for it had lived
In many memories ; and much she longed
To see them and to have them for herself.
Sorely she pressed the king, beseeching him
To ask the swans of Keevog, but the king
Was mightily ashamed because of her,
And quite refused to ask the blessed saint.
But Decca trying by all means to get
The swans into her hands for playthings, left
Her palace, threatening never to return
Unto her husband's home, since thus the king
Had slighted her, and had refused her suit.
Then the king Largnean, when he found her gone,

Sent messengers in haste to bid her turn
And he would get the swans for her. So she
Returned again from Kil-da-lua—there
The messengers had overtaken her.
So the king, pressed to keep his promise, sends
A messenger to Keevog, to request
That he would bring the birds unto the queen.
But Keevog would not bring them. Then the king
Leaving his palace went into the west
And comes himself to Keevog, and he asks
Whether the words were true his messengers
Had brought to him, that Keevog had refused
To send the birds to him. But Keevog said
That it was true indeed. And at the word
The king all swollen with a sudden rage
Strides to the altar where the white swans stood,
Seizes the silver chains, and turns to draw
The four birds after him—the saint in fear
Lest he should hurt them, following—until
They reach the open door. But as the king
Strides forward with the swans, there creeps a stain
Over their glossy plumage, their white necks
Begin to shrink, their down to fade away,
The feathers of their wings to disappear,
And in an instant where the graceful birds
Had been, behold three tottering old men
And one small aged woman with white hair,

Bony and thin, and wrinkled ; all the four
Feeble, and palsied with extreme old age.

But the gray woman fixed her blood-shot eye,
First on the king, who started pale with fear
And turned and fled, and then upon the saint,
And spake with an uncertain feeble voice,
Mumbling and broken, not the silver tones
That fell from her in music till that hour.

"Thou wilt, O Keevog, grieve for us, and yet
Our grief is greater to be leaving thee.
O holy man death catches hold of us.

Ah, hasten now, and in the name of Him
Whom thou hast told us died for us, do thou
Pour on us quick the water that shall give
Another life to us in that new world
Where we are going to. And promise us
To make one grave where we are standing now,
And bury us together. And as I
Sheltered my brothers, when we swam as swans
On many a stormy night of cold and rain,
So place them now beside me in the grave ;
Conn standing at my right, and Fiachra
At my left side and Ae before my breast."

Then the saint hastened and baptized the four,
And, as the water touched them, one by one
They dropped down dead beneath the holy cross
Wherewith he signed. And even as they died

The saint looked up and in the air he saw
 Four shining children with light silver wings,
 And laughing faces smiling down on him.
 And as he looked they rose into the air,
 And sailing into heaven disappeared.

Then was he filled with gladness for he knew
 Their souls were saved. But looking down he saw
 The shrunken bodies lying at his feet,
 And when he saw he wept. There by the church
 He dug one deep wide grave and buried them ;
 Finnuala with Conn at her right hand
 And Fiachra at her left side, and Ae
 Standing before her. And he raised a mound
 And set a great stone over it, and wrote
 Their names in Ogam, and lamented them.

Know that before our holy Patric came
 This land was full of sorcery, and ruled
 By Magic of the learned men of old
 And ancient Druids. That has ceased to be
 Since holy Patric brought a purer faith.—
 But of enchantments such as Eefi played
 On the De Danann children, we could tell
 Stories to keep you listening many days.

Thus far the story of the sons of Lir. Thus far.



the fate of the children of
TUIRREACHN.



N evil thing it is to let the life
From out the body of a blame-
less man,
Light as a piece of thistle-down
that drifts
Far up the air, so from the open
wound

The startled soul out-leaps and takes its flight
Into the clouds to never more return.
Whoso is guilty of the bloody deed
Whereby the living, loving, active man
Becomes a clod of earth, must pay the price
Of that which he has taken—many head
Of horned cattle, many fleecy sheep,
And many graceful steeds to draw the yoke

Or whirl the chariot. So has been the law
 From earliest times in Erin till to-day,
 And learned brehons must decide how great
 The eric is to be. But hearken now
 And I shall tell of such an erio paid
 As ne'er was paid before, and of the fate
 That overtook the sons of Tuireann, three
 The noblest men of Erin, they who slew
 A chief by treachery, and paid such price
 As never had been paid for blood before.

In the old times, the days of long ago,
 E're yet our fathers the Milesian race
 Were firmly rooted in this sacred soil
 Of grass-green Erin, the De Danann men
 Bore sway and peopled all its myriad vales.
 But in the days of Nuadh of the hand
 Of silver, the Fomorian race who swarmed
 Out of the north of Lochlann waxed strong
 And very cruel, and they set a tax
 Over the crushed De Dananns. Very sore
 The tribute was, most heavy to be born,
 A tax on kneading troughs, a tax on querns,
 A tax on baking flags, a tax besides
 Of one gold ounce for each De Danann head.
 And whoso failed to bring his tribute due
 Unto the hill of Tara, year by year,

The strong Fomorians sent their men of war,
And harried and oppressed him till he paid.

Now Nuadh of the Silver Hand, the king,
In these days held at Usna on the hill
A great fair meeting, and the people came
And filled the plain in thousands, and the chiefs
Were all assembled there, and not a man
Of the De Danann race of any mark,
But showed himself amongst his fellow-men
In that great throng that thronged about the king

And as the people were assembling, lo!
Out of the east there comes a gleam of arms
And sound of trampling steeds, and men looked up
To see who nears. And soon they were aware
Of many warriors on snow-white steeds,
A handsome band, and, leading them, a youth,
Comely and very tall, his open face
Shining as brightly as the orb of day.
This was the son of Kian (Kian who
Fell by the sons of Tuireann afterward):
Lugh the Long-handed was the name whereby
Men called him, but they named him at the last
The great Ildana, for his wondrous skill
In many sciences. His shining troops
Who rode with him, were of the fairy host
From out the Land of Tairngiré. The sons

Of great Manannan, son of Lir, were there
Amongst the rest. He rode upon the steed
Of great Manannan, never rider yet
Was slain from off her back. She was as swift
As are the winds of March that sweep adown
The sunless plains; o'er water, air, and land,
She sped and had no rival. And he wore
Manannan's coat of armour, never blade
Through it, above it, or below it, yet
Reddened the skin of him who wore. And on
His golden head a golden helmet gleamed
With two great brilliant stones in front of it
And one behind; and when he raised it up
His face was shining as the tireless sun
On some dry day in summer. And the sword
That hung at his left side was very keen.
It was Manannan's sword the Answerer—
It answered so none answered back again.
It by the terror of itself would make
Those who beheld its gleaming faint away
For very fear; men's eyes that saw it grew
As they were blind, their strength would fade and melt
To woman's weakness. So the troops came on.

Then they were welcomed by the chiefs, and sat
Amidst the others and were glad and fain.

But in a little time thereafter came
Another troop of men, most large of limb,

And ugly to behold, and very fierce,
Gloomy and rough, and apter far to strike
Than render civil answer. These were they
Who had been sent with powers to gather in
Their taxes, by the rude Fomorian bands.
There were nine nines of them, and as they came
The king rose up to greet them, and the great
Assembly crowded with a thousand chiefs
Rose like one man to do them reverence.
Because the fear of them was over all,
And no man in those days of terror dared
To punish even his own son without
Consent from them. But Lugh was much amazed
To see the chiefs rise up, and so he turned
And asked the king with openness, "O king,
Why dost thou now rise up and greet these huge
And surly monsters in the form of men,
And yet ye would not rise for us?" The king
Made answer thus: "I tell thee if a child,
An infant of a year, should keep its seat
And not rise up before them, 'twere enough
To cause them slay us, even to a man."

But Lugh mused, deep in silence—not for long;
His passion flamed within his soul and cast
A glow of ruddy anger o'er his face,
And turning to the king he said: "My heart
Is strongly urging me to slay these men."

But the king answered very prudently—

For there was never yet a faultless king

Elected by the great De Danann race,

But was in all things very sure and wise.

“Thou shalt not do so Lugh, because the deed

Would be for us a bad one; they would send

An army hither and consume us all.”

But Lugh regarded not, for something spake

Within his breast, and told him that the time

To break at once the hard Fomorian yoke

From off the crushed De Danann neck, was come.

And so he chafed within his mighty soul,

And all his sinews swelled beneath the skin,

And all his flesh grew eager as a flame

To spring to deeds of blood. As some great hound

Held by his master in a leash, who sees

The antlered stag before him, or the deer

Which he has come to chase, will stiffen first,

Then strain and spring for utter eagerness

To loose himself, whilst all the time his eyes

Unswerving fix their prey, until at last

The thong no longer keeps him, and he bursts

Out of the hand that should have held him in,

And thirsting for the smell of blood he hurls

Himself upon his quarry—even so

Lugh, the Long-handed, quivered on that day,

At once pushed forward and held back again.

Urged by his own great courage to arise
And slay the tall Fomorians and commit
The race of the De Dananns to the war,
Which when it burst must save or end them all;
But yet restrained a moment by the words
The king had uttered, and the fears they raised
Before him—thus, uncertain if to rise
Or to remain were best, he sat and burned,
With madness in his mind, and on his arms
The iron muscles started out in heaps,
And all his fingers twitched, and on the hilt
Of great Manannan's sword his grasp was pressed
So mightily that underneath the nails
The drops of blood sprang out, and all his face
Was clouded over like a burning sun
O'ertaken by a sudden stormy mist.
Set were his teeth and rigid, and his eye
Cast lightnings, and his nostrils quivered wide.
And so he doubted in himself a time
And halted in his mind. The prudent king
Marked him and knew not whether it were best
To let him loose, or hold him in, and thrice
He half put forth his hand to keep him down,
And thrice he drew it back and touched him not,
And held his breath in great uncertainty.
But at the last his fury gained on Lugh
Above his fears. He rose as rises up

A bearded lion, and he shook himself,
And drew the great white sword from out the sheath
And felt the edge of it, and all men near
Knew what was coming, for the deadly frown
Between his knitted brows spake death and doom.
Then at a bound he sprang among the men
Who were collecting taxes, and the sword
The Answerer was flashing in his hand
So quick that none could see the blade of it.
But as a child will take a slender rod
And lop the heads of poppies, so he lopped
The shaggy bearded heads of those fierce men.
For wheresoe'er the edge of that fell sword
Alighted, there it shore its way with ease,
Dividing iron helmets as a knife
Will sheer through cheeses. Long before the men
Assembled at the fair were 'ware of it
Or knew what caused the shouting and the press,
The tax-collecting men had been cut down,
All except nine, for these had gathered close,
Driven together in a little knot,
And trembling for their lives. But Lugh cried loud :
"Go to your vile and worthless king, speed hence
Like trembling hares, and tell him how ye saw
Lugh the Long-handed, son of Kian, treat
His miserable tax-collecting wasps.
But I have drawn their stings, and I shall draw

His sting from Balor of the Evil Eye
If he come hither. Speed ye hence, ye swine,
And bid himself to come and speak to me!"
Then the nine men with gloomy looks, and scowls
Of hate and impotence, rose up and went
To bring these tidings to their dreaded king,
Fomorian Balor of the Evil Eye.

But when the people knew, at once the minds
Of all in that assembly swayed like reeds.
And some were very sorrowful, and some
Were wild with joy, because of Lugh's red deed.
The aged men cried out, because they thought
That now the whole De Danann race must end
In war with the Fomorians; but the young
And active warriors were glad and fain
To have a hope of ending the disgrace
Which had so long oppressed them. Thus the crowd
Was rent with violence of hopes and fears,
And manifold emotion. But the king
Was grievously perplexed, and doubted sore
If it were best to say he had no part
Nor any hand in Lugh's fell deed, or else
To take his stand with him, and cause the men
Of Erin to be summoned, to revolt
Against their tyrants. So at last the fair
Broke up in great confusion, and the king
Went back into his palace, but he gave

Nor order nor command, and all men feared.

Now after Balor of the Evil Eye
Had heard the tidings of the slaughter made
Amongst his tax collectors, forth he sent
Throughout all Lochlann messengers to call
The hosts together. Then he caused a fleet
Of warlike vessels full of food and drink
And weapons to be brought into one place,
With seams well caulked with pitch, with well sewn
sails,

With strong sound timbers, and his troops embarked,
Commanded by his son, the chieftain Bræ.
And Balor the Fomorian with great strides
Paced by the harbour where his men embarked,
And with a voice of thunder shouted thus:
"When ye have cut the head from off the man,
That insolent Ildana, Lugh, then throw
A cable round that wretched little place,
That island Erin, which so troubles us,
And tie it to your ships and tow it back,
And set it here by Lochlann, where these vile
De Dananns must lie quiet or must die."

But when that numerous array took port
In western Connacht, they began to spoil
And prey upon the country. And Bove Derg,
The Dagda's son, was king in Connacht then,

And he was friend to Lugh. Now word was brought
To Lugh, to say the foreigners were come
And trampling all west Connacht, and his heart
Was stirred within him: and he came in haste
To Nuadh of the Silver Hand, the king
Of Erin, then at Tara, and he asked
For aid to help Bove Derg. But Nuadh said,
"I shall not send a man, so long as I —
Am left in peace of the Fomorian men:
I shall not war against them, let the king
Of Connacht guard himself." Then Lugh went forth
Out of the palace chafing, full of wrath;
And riding through the plains from Tara north,
He meets his father Kian, and two more,
Brothers of Kian, and he tells them all;
And asks their aid to raise with utmost speed
A host to succour Connacht. Then the three
Swore they would grant it. Those men's single aid
Was worth an army. And they promised him
To search through Erin straightway, and to bring
Their friends and kin to one appointed place,
In readiness to fight. "Aye! let," they said,
"The sluggish craven Nuadh hug himself
Within his walls of Tara." So they turned
And two went southwards, but the other, Kian,
Went northwards by himself, in haste to rouse
His friends for battle. And he went until

He came to Moy-Murhemna, place of herds.
 Nor was he long upon those spacious plains
 Until he was aware of warriors three
 That rode behind him. Armèd were they all,
 And as they moved he saw their lances gleam.
 Then Kian spake within himself and said :
 "I know not who these men may be, and if
 My brothers twain were here, I should not dread
 To meet them, yet I hold it better now
 To hide myself a space, and let them pass."
 Then with a wand of gold he smote himself
 And changed himself into a bristly pig,
 And joined a herd of swine that through the plains
 Roved feeding. For the chiefs and greater men
 Of the De Danann race were evermore
 Skilled in the arts of magic ; not a man
 Who had a chance of chieftainship, but spent
 Long years of study, learning magic might,
 With time and toil, as feats of arms are learned.
 Thus Kian changed himself into a pig
 And grunted with the others, and began
 To root the earth, and hoped he would escape.

Now those three warriors that Kian saw
 Behind him, were the three renowned sons
 Of Tuireann the De Danann, and their names
 Were Brian, Ur, and Yukar. These three lived

At feud with Kian and his brothers twain,
For never yet had those six warriors met,
But they had fought together, three with three.
And so when Kian saw them come anigh
He joyed that he had not awaited them
Without a change of form. But Brian spake:
"Tell me, my brothers, where is he I saw
Before us on the plain." They answered him:
"Lo, he has disappeared, we know not where."
Said Brian then: "My brothers the red tongue
Of war is out, the days be full of fear,
And these be heavy times and dangerous:
Ye did most wrong to let your eyes go rove
From marking of that man. And yet methinks
That he has changed himself into a pig
And lurks in yonder herd. Whoe'er it be
Of this be sure, he is no friend of ours."

Then said the brothers: "If he be a pig
He must escape us, for we could not slay
The whole great herd on chance." But Brian said:
"Yet shall I find him. Ye should also know
How that is to be done." Therewith he grasped
A wand of gold, and touched his brothers' heads,
And uttered Druid's words, and at the stroke
He changed them into greyhounds, very fleet,
And strong of limb, sharp-snouted, keen of eye.
Then both of them, with noses to the earth

Ran with the speed of wind toward that great herd,
 Of grunting pigs, and as they came they yelped,
 With short sharp cries, like hounds upon a trail,
 And burst upon the frightened flock: but these
 Scattered a hundred ways before the rush
 Of those great dogs, and squealed, and doubled back,
 And twisted round, and many hundred feet
 Lifted together smote the hardened earth.
 They as they went were pressed into a mass
 With side and shoulder, pushing each to each.
 And at last they stood in one close ring
 And faced the hounds. But at the rerè one pig
 Fell out from all the others, running hard,
 And making for the shelter of a grove
 That grew thereby. And Brian as it ran
 Pushed swiftly in betwixt it and the trees,
 And, as it passed him, drove his hunting spear
 Deep in behind the shoulder. But the pig
 Screamed at the blow and shrieked with human voice:
 "Oh, son of Tuireann, evil is the deed
 To slay me thus, well knowing who I be."
 "The voice," said Brian, "is a human voice,
 And yet I know thee not." It answered back:
 "Lugh the Long-handed's father, Kian, asks
 For peace and quarter, do not slay him thus."
 Then Brian's brothers wished to grant his life
 And show him mercy; only Brian swore

By all the gods and demons in the clouds,
That he would slay him; that although the life
Should to his body seven times return,
Yet he would seven times out-drive it thence.
Then Kian cried with lamentable voice:
"Oh, grant me this at least ye cruel chiefs,
To take man's form again, and slay me not
In this vile semblance of a pig." "'Tis well,"
Said Brian, then, "and easier to me
To slay a man at times than kill a pig.
I grant thy wish." Then Kian's form returned;
And thus he spake: "Ye sons of Tuireann, know
I have outwitted ye, for had ye slain
Me as a pig, the eric would have been
The eric of a pig; but now I am
A man again, and never man was killed,
Nor shall be killed, whose eric fine shall be
A tithe so great as mine. Whatever arms
Ye slay me with shall tell to Lugh my son
That I am slain by you, and he shall press
An eric from you that ye wot not of."

"Thou shalt indeed be slain," said Brian then,
"But not with weapons of a warrior."
And at the word he stooped and lifted up
A hugh grey stone long buried in the earth,
Mossy with age, and sharp and angular,
And straining all his muscles hurled it down

On Kian where he lay, and crushed and brake
 His fair white body, and his brothers then
 Collected other of the stones of earth,
 And smote him cruelly therewith, that soon
 The tender life was beaten out of him;
 And all his body lay a gory mass
 Of battered flesh and bone. But when at last
 His soul had flitted to the souls of men,
 They made a grave and buried him away
 Lest any one should mark their evil deed.
 But earth was angry at the horrid work,
 And heaved, and stirred uneasily to feel
 The guiltless blood, down trickling through its clay.
 And would not take the body to itself,
 But soon as it was buried cast it up
 Right through the stones and clay wherewith they
 piled

The hole where they had hidden him: but they
 Hollowed the grave again and put him down
 A fathom deep, and stamped the stones above,
 And laid the sods in order overhead,
 And turned to go. But Mother Earth again
 Cast up the body from its hiding place
 And would not hold it nor conceal the deed
 That had been done. And seven times they made
 The grave afresh, and deeper every time,
 And every time the angry earth flung up

The corpse upon its surface. But at length
When they had buried him the seventh time,
The earth grew weary and desired rest,
And so it cast him up no more. But they,
The murderers, rode forward, and they joined
The host that Lugh had brought together, soon
To battle with the wild Fomorian men:
And with the rest they mingled, and none marked
How they had come from such a deed of blood.

And now had Lugh gone through the whole green
land

Of pleasant Erin, till there was not left
A man of kin unto himself, or one
Who owed him aught, or loved him, but was roused
And brought with him to Connacht, there to meet
The newly-come Fomorians, and to quell
The insolence of Bras. And at the last
The long-expected battle came, the first
Great battle of Moytura's plain, and Death
Passed riding on the wind, and streams ran red,
And grass was died in crimson, and the kites
Were satiated with the fat of men.
For foot to foot, and shield to shield they fought
And in the hedges of the gleaming spears
Were gaps of carnage, and the shivered swords
Strewed all the earth, and there was neither pause

Nor any halt for breath, till long-armed Bras,
 The tall Fomorian chief, and Lugh had met,
 While all the host stood still to see the sparks
 Fly from their helmets and their dented swords.
 But at the last Bras called to Lugh and swore
 By moon and stars and all the elements
 That he would lead his men away, and ne'er
 Leave Lochlann any more, nor come to war
 With any of the men in Erin's isle,
 Only let Lugh withdraw his army now
 And cease from slaughtering. And so it was
 That Lugh drew off his plumed chiefs, and Bras
 With such of the Fomorians as escaped
 The hungry edge of the flesh-biting sword
 Got to their ships and spanned their sails, and flew
 In haste to Lochlann, full of wounds and fear.

But when the carnage of the day was o'er
 And the Fomorians had withdrawn their bands,
 Then Lugh, all spent with fighting and with toil,
 Leant on his sword, the Answerer, and both
 His arms were bathed in blood, and blood in drops
 Down trickled from his forehead, and he stood
 And gasped out-worn with all the violence
 Of those great battle blows which he had dealt
 From early morn till noontide. As he stood
 And rested so, he saw his uncles come,

His father Kian's brothers, and he asked :

"How fared it with my father in this fight?"

And many voices answered him at once.

"We saw not Kian, Kian was not here."

"Then is he dead," said Lugh, "for sure I know

That had he lived he would have helped me well

This bloody day. And now I swear an oath :

My parching mouth shall not be cooled with drink,

No food shall pass my lips, my tongue shall touch

No substance, on my eyes the dewy veil

Of soothing slumber shall not softly fall,

Until I know both how, and where, and when

This deed was done, and who hath done this deed."

Then he set forth, and with a little band

Of friends, he left the battle-field, and rode

To Tara, yet he found not any sign

Of Kian, and he heard no word of him.

But when he came to Moy Murhemma's plain

Where Kian had been put to death, he heard

A voice far-off and feeble, and it seemed

As though it sounded over him, and then

As though it sounded under him, and came

From far beneath the ground. And so he stood

And listened till his heart began to beat,

Aloud, and then he thought within himself

He had but heard the beating of his heart.

But even as he thought that thought, him seemed
 That from the stones that lay beneath his feet
 Thin voices came, and they were speaking this :
 " Oh, Lugh, right under thee thy father lies,
 The sons of Tuireann slew him, hurling us
 Against the hero till his life was gone."

Then Lugh and all the rest were smit with awe,
 And woe and wonder. With their spears and swords
 They dug the earth whence weirdly rose the voice,
 And full three fathoms under it they found
 The shattered body of Lugh's father laid,
 Covered with bruises, mangled, full of wounds.
 And Lugh beheld, but when he saw them lay
 The body on the prairie, looking down
 He uttered not a sound, for at the sight
 His whole soul melted out of him ; the light
 Forsook his eyes, the blood forsook his heart,
 Till full of longing grief he threw himself
 Upon the father's shattered breast and kissed
 His lips three times, and rent his hair, and cried :
 " Ye Gods to whom I pay my worship, why
 Was I not present when my father died !
 An evil deed, an evil deed was done
 When one De Danann slew another. Now
 The sight has failed my eyes, and in my ears
 There sounds no voice, and at my heart the pulse
 Has ceased to beat. Oh, for this evil deed

I shall exact a vengeance hundred-fold!

There then they placed the hero in his grave
Once more, and over him they raised his tomb
And piled a mighty cairn, and there they set
A stately mass of stone above, and wrote
His name in Ogam and lamented him.

But when the rites were ended, Lugh spake thus
To all the friends who rode with him: "Go now
To pleasant Tara, where the great High King
Of Erin-all is sitting on his throne.
Await me there, but see ye say no word
Of this, my father's death."

So these went forth
And came to Tara. Silently and slow,
With sunken head, alone, and full of grief
Lugh followed marked of none. But when he came
Into the palace, then the king rose up
And welcomed him, and all men greeted him,
Because the fame of him had gone abroad,
How he had fought upon that bloody day
In western Connacht, when the foreign men
Were forced to fly. And hence the king rejoiced
To see him come, not bearing angry grudge
Against himself, for having erst refused
To lend him warriors. And he caused a seat
Be set for him, next to himself, above
All other chiefs and princes, so they sat.

Now Lugh directed both his angry eyes
 Upon the men around him, and he saw
 Upon four golden-studded seats, the sons
 Of Tuireann sitting, high in honour held
 Both by the king himself and all the rest ;
 Because there was no other man of all
 The great De Danann chiefs who could excel
 Those three in battle, Lugh alone except :
 And great had been the slaughter they had made
 Amongst the tall Fomorians. But when Lugh
 First saw them, then he started at the sight,
 And rose before the whole assembly there,
 And turned him to the king, and all men looked
 To see what he would say, and wondered much
 To see him rise. And thus he spake : " O, king,
 Order the chain of silence to be brought
 And shaken." Then the High King gave command
 And that sweet chain was brought, and by a hand
 That knew to shake it, shaken. And the tone
 Was very sweet and crept along the courts
 And filled the spacious places of the hall,
 And sounded through the palace soft and low.
 And then there fell a silence as of death
 On all that great assembly ; no one stirred
 Nor even whispered. All was very still.

Then Lugh rose up once more and said : " Ye
 chiefs

Of the De Danann race, I see ye give
Attention unto me. Behold, I put
A question unto every man of you,
And wait an answer of you. What would ye
To him who wittingly and of design
Should slay your father being innocent?"

Then all who heard him sat and answered not,
And marvelled at the question, but at last
The High King Nuadh, said: "What meaneth this?
For well we wot thy father is not slain."
"Aye! is he slain," said Lugh, "and in this hall
I see the man who spoiled him of his life."

Then the king answered: "Should a person slay
My father, why methinks that sudden death
Were no sweet vengeance on him; day by day
I should lop off a member, till at last
He died right slowly, killed before mine eyes."
And on this wise the other nobles spake,
And so the sons of Tuireann when their turn
To speak was come, gave answer with the rest.

Then Lugh rose up again: "The three who slew
My father, now are joining with the rest
In passing such a sentence. But I claim
A fitting eric for my father's blood,
And should they hesitate to give it, know
I shall not break the law of our great king,
Nor violate that safe-guard which he gives

To all within his palace, but at least
 Those three shall never leave this banquet hall
 Until they settle with me. I have said."

Then spake the King of Erin: "Had I slain
 Your father, I were well content myself
 To pay an eric for him and escape."

Now those three sons of Tuireann gathered close
 Together in a knot, and reasoned low
 Amongst themselves, for both the younger wished
 To openly avouch their deed before
 The whole assembly. Only Brian feared
 Lest Lugh were subtly plotting to obtain
 Their full confession in the sight of all,
 And then should cunningly withdraw his word
 And say no more about the eric fine,
 But ask the king for leave to take their lives.
 And so he rose, and prudent were his words.

"Oh, Lugh, we know why thou hast spoken thus.
 Because that in time past there was a feud
 Between us and thy father, thou dost think
 That we must now be guilty of his blood.
 Thou thinkest wrongly, for if Kian fell
 'Twas not by us. And yet I tell thee this,
 (Since thou so openly accusest us)
 That we, to silence thee, will pay thee down
 An eric, as though we indeed had slain

Thy father, whom we neither slew nor saw."

"You think, perchance," said Lugh, "I will not take

Your eric from you. But I ne'ertheless
Shall take it."

"Let us hear it then," said they.

"The eric I demand," said Lugh, "is this:

Of apples three, a skin, a shining spear,

Two horses and a chariot, seven swine,

A certain hound, a roasting-spit, and three

Loud shouts upon a hill. I shall remit

A portion of this eric if ye deem

That it is made too heavy or too great."

"We do not think it great," said Brian then,

"Unless there be some treachery behind,

And much I doubt you. For I do not count

Three hundred thousand apples, and of skins

A thousand, with a hundred of the rest,

Horses and chariots, shining spears, and shouts

Upon a hundred hills, would be too great."

"And yet," said Lugh, "I do not think it small.

But give security that ye shall pay

The eric I demand, and I shall give

A surety that I shall demand no more."

"Ourselves," said Brian, "are security."

"Not so," said Lugh, "for I have known before

A chieftain, great as ye in all men's eyes,

Who promised erio readily, and yet
As readily forgot to pay it down."

Then did the sons of Tuireann give as pledge
Bove Derg, the Dagda's son, with him the king
Of Erin, and a score of greatest chiefs
Of the De Dananns. Gladly stood they all
In pledge for Tuireann's sons. Said Lugh again:
"Now shall I tell you what this eric is.
The skin that I demand of ye belongs
To Toosh the king of Greece, and in it lies
A healing for the wounded, yea it makes
Cold water be as wine. I think indeed
Ye shall not easily come by the skin.
The spear I ask of you is that men call
Aradvar, and its point is as a fire
Kept always cooling in a caldron full
Of water lest the blade should burn or harm
The people of the city, for it longs
To slake its heat with blood. It is the spear
Of Peeshar, Prince of Persia, hard to get.
The horses twain and chariot that I asked
Belong to Dobar, king of Sisle's isle,
And travel equally by land and sea,
I do not think them easy to obtain.
The pigs I ask of you are seven pigs,
One slays the seven, yet they be not slain:
And Asal of the Golden Pillars owns

That herd, they are not lightly to be had.
The hound that I demand of you is called
Falinnish, he belongs unto the king
Of far Irrua, and whatever beast
But looks upon him falls for very fright;
He is not very easy to be got.
The roasting spit I ask of you is one
The women use in Fiancarya's isle.
And last of all the shouts that ye must give
Upon a hill for me—know then there is
A hill called Meequeen, in the very north
Of furthest Lochlann. Meequeen and his sons
Are bound by *geasa* not to let a shout
Be shouted on that hill. It was with them
My father learned his many feats of arms,
And much they loved him; and should I forgive
His slaughter at your hands, yet they will not.
And though ye gain the other things, I think
Ye shall not shout those shouts upon that hill."

Now fill the wine-cup high, and crown with flowers
The beaded goblet. Let the harper drink.
For I am wearied telling, and must tell
Much yet, before Clan Tuireann find their rest.

L0C01 11.

Ah, who shall go about to count the woes,
Or who shall take in hand to tell the tale
Of all the sufferings, or who shall sing
The sorrow that the sons of Tuireann found
Piled up upon their path, in seeking out
The eric they had promised! All the toils
That all the men of all their tribe, and all
The kinsmen of their kinsmen e'er endured
Were nothing in the scale of those long days
Of weary, weary labour at the oar,
And toilful tossing over sunless deeps,
Distress upon the sea, distress on land.
They faced the pathless mountains, deserts wild,
Where as they passed the sound of their own voice
Startled them when they heard it; stormy seas
Swooping in swollen torrents, traced with toil
Up to their very source before they dared
To cross their angry water; mountains bald,
White with eternal winter, jagged rocks
Not to be scaled by men, and seas of ice
That with their cold congealed the warmest blood;
Thick forests where the prowling beasts of blood
Went stalking round them all the day, and then
The sleepless round beside the dying fire
With spear and shield, and anxious eyes that ache

With scanning of the darkness ; and they faced
The hunger fierce that gnaws a man away,
The thirst that shrivels up the parched mouth,
And dries the tongue ; they bore the bitter blast
Of nipping northern winds, the driving sleet
Whipt o'er the open plain, that chills the limbs
And swells the eyes and blisters all the skin ;
The cruel frost that creeping on the night
Froze till their shields were fastened to the clay ;
The blinding sun that shot upon their heads
Its scorching arrows downward, till the steel
That glinted in their spears grew deadly hot
As plucked from out a furnace, while the air
Hung in a haze as heated by the breath
Of myriad fires unseen, and every step
Over the scorching sand appeared to be
The last before their grave. Their whole long way
Seemed paved with bleaching bones and signs of death.

Yet one would cheer the other, and they braced
Their minds to meet their sufferings, their hearts
Were not dismayed within them. Never once
Did any thought of giving up the quest
And settling far from Erin seize their minds :
For they were mighty chiefs and of the best
In grass-green Erin. Only Lugh himself,
For whom they sought this eric, was to them
A rival or an equal—none save he

In valour and endurance was their peer.
 But life will have a life, and blood out-poured
 Calls out aloud for blood. And so they passed
 From land to land, from sea to stormy sea,
 As with a shadow over them, and sought
 The erio up and down in many climes,
 Through many countries, ever toiling on
 To make the sum complete.

I tell you not

How they obtained of Lugh that magic boat,
 The Sweeper of the Waves, Manannan's bark,
 To aid them in their quest. The ancient bards
 Have told it us, and all the wile they used
 To gain that fairy vessel. It was such
 That when they bade it steer its steady course
 For any isle or harbour, at the word
 It straight would quiver under them, and turn
 Its prow, without a stroke of oar;
 And of itself would lightly move, and mount
 Over the bosom of the crested waves
 And run them down, and pass above their heads
 As lightly as a seagull, when it rides
 Upon some slowly heaving inland lake.
 And smoothly as it sped no wanton wave
 Washed over it, it moved as moves a bark
 That drifts down some dark river, when the tide
 Is swift and silent; clear of either bank

It keeps the central current till it swing
Into the great wide sea for which it made.
So moved with them the Sweeper of the Waves,
Where'er their own desire would bid them go,
And shortened much their task. They needed not
To tug the live-long day the ashen oar,
To slowly urge the sluggish boat, and bend
Their chieftains' bodies to ignoble task.
And much they gloried in the subtlety
Whereby they won from Lugh the magic boat.
Swiftly they sailed, their ways were deep in death,
Doom and destruction followed where they passed,
And blood flowed red around them.

Many bards

Have sung their wanderings and all the deeds
They wrought to gain their eric, singing each
At length with much exactness. Every piece
Of that great eric fine so hardly won
Made for itself a song; for there was not
A single portion of it, but the blood
Of brave men bought it, or the subtlety
Of much renowned heroes after moons,
Or years of patient plotting and of toil
Gained it at last. But I shall follow not
The steps of Erin's ancient bards in this:
For were I to repeat from point to point
When first they launched their bark and went in gloom

Out from the silent harbour, and the green
 Far-grassy shores, and well-defined coast
 Of sun-bright Erin, see! to-morrow's rays
 Would redden in the east and find me still
 Telling their story, and the half would be
 Yet unrecorded.

Know ye then these three,
 The sons of Tuireann, did accomplish all
 The tasks that made the fine; they took the skin
 Of healing from the hall of Toosh and left
 The head of that great king from side to side
 Cleft like an apple; and the fiery spear
 They stole from out its cauldron; and they took
 By fraud and violence from Sisle's isle
 The chariot and the steeds that had no peer;
 And Asal of the Golden Pillars paid
 The seven swine as ransom for his life;
 And the great hound Falinnish, and the spit
 The women in the isle beneath the sea
 Of Fiancarya used, they brought them both
 Into their vessel; and the apples four
 Of gleaming gold from out the guarded close
 Of green Isberna where amid the leaves
 They glowed like points of fire were snatched away;
 And of the mighty eric fine, at last
 Nothing remained except to give the shouts
 Upon the hill of Meequeen; and they held

The skin of healing in their power, and knew
They need not fear the rents of gaping wounds
With that great cure behind them. So they steered
Joyous at heart and full of confidence
Straight for the shores of Lochlann, and they hoped
To easily accomplish this last task.
And easily they had accomplished it
And come again to Erin, never more
To leave their father Tuireann or to leave
Their dark-eyed sister, Enya, but their fate
Turned yet once more against them.

For beyond

The sea-green waters, very far away,
Over the waste of rolling ocean foam,
Within a little nook of Erin's isle,
A knowledge came to Lugh that they had now
Accomplished all their task except to shout
The shouts upon the hill. But well he knew
That should they once make up the eric fine,
And come again to Erin, then his life
Would be their aim, and not the gods of air
Could shield him from their vengeance. Even now
(The Bards have told us) he was full of plans,
Preparing for that second deathful fight
Upon Moytura's plain, which they have sung
So many times. And well he knew that vain
Were all that he had suffered, fought and wrought,

If they should land and pay their fine in full.
 But for the battle which he had in view
 He needed half the eric.

So he set

A very subtle and a potent spell
 To go and meet them as they sailed, and cause
 All recollection of the shouts to fade
 Out of their mind. And so the spell went forth,
 Noted of none, and known to Lugh alone,
 Working its noiseless way by day and night,
 Over the sea, and through the troubled air
 Beneath the silent stars, and all the time
 Straight making for the three. And when at last
 It met the Sweeper of the Waves that swept
 On to the shores of Lochlann, then it creeps
 Into the boat and round it, and begins
 To work its will. But as a wreath of mist
 That heavily hangs low and will not rise
 From out some hollow glen, when once the sun
 Begins to mount the heavens, shread by shread,
 Floats off into the air and disappears;
 So from their minds the memory of that
 Which lay before them, faded far away
 From out the chambers of their consciousness;
 Till Brian spake at last: "My brothers, say
 Where be we bound, and whither flies our bark?
 Methinks our task is ended." And the twain

Answered and said: "We make for Lochlann's coasts,
Yet nothing calls us thither." "Steer we then
For home," said Brian, so they steered the bark
For pleasant Erin o'er the deep grey sea
And thought no more upon the fatal shouts
Certain that all was finished; joying much
With an exceeding joy, to think that now
After so many years of blood and wounds
And plots and battles, they should toil no more,
But live in peace thenceforward on the plains
Of smiling Erin, with their sister dear
And with their father Tuireann and their kin,
Hearing once more their own sweet native tongue,
Honoured of all and trusted of the king.

So full of hope, and joying in the days
They saw before them, doubting not at all,
But fearless for the future, in they run
Straight to the mouth of their beloved stream,
The silver-flowing Boyne: and on they glide
Until they reach Dún Tuireann, where their sire
And dark-eyed Enya falling on their necks
With joyous shouts receive them once again
After so many weary weary years.
They wonder at the ransom, at the hound
Whose very look could freeze the startled fawn,
And at the spear whose hissing point was plunged

In ever-bubbling water, while the haft
 Writhing and quivering seemed all alive,
 And at the other strange and costly things
 That made this mighty eric. But at length
 When many days of happiness were gone,
 Deep satiated with the sounds of home,
 And questions put and answered many times,
 The three went forth and came with speed once more
 To Tara, to the king, to seek for Lugh,
 And pay him all their ransom.

Then the king
 And noble chiefs and princes came, and Lugh
 Came also, and they stood upon the plain
 Before the palace, while the brothers three
 Approaching Lugh, presented to him there
 Their eric, bit by bit, until at last
 The whole was paid ; and all the chiefs looked on
 And marvelled much to see such wondrous things :
 And marvelled more to think that any three
 Who ever lived could capture such a prize
 And not be slain in seeking it. And all,
 Lost in amaze and wonderment and awe,
 Shouted to heaven praising Tuireann's sons.
 Also the king rejoiced to see them back
 Amongst his other chieftains, and he grasped
 The hand of each, and bade them enter in

And tell him all the wonders they had seen,
And would have brought them: only Lugh, who now
Had come from stowing at his servants' hands
The eric fine away, cried clear and loud
That all the chiefs should hear him, and the king:

“Assuredly, ye sons of Tuireann, lo!
Myself confesses it! there ne'er was slain,
Nor shall be slain, the man for whom this fine
Were insufficient as an eric. Yet
One little thing remains. Ye have not said
If ye have shouted upon Meequeen's hill.”

E'en as he spake, the spell that held them bound
In deep forgetfulness dissolved away,
Passing as flits a bird from 'out a cage
That soars to heaven and is not seen again.
Then anguish and amazement wrapped them round,
And fear came over them. It was as though
The wing of Death flapped by them. And they turned
And spake no word, but went the way they came,
And spent that night in sorrow in their home.

But on the morrow with the dawn of day
They launched a bark, and put to sea once more,
And made for Lochlann, very faint at heart,
Without the skin of healing, and without
The Sweeper of the Waves to waft them on,
Where'er they might desire.

Of this their last
 Long voyage over the sea the ancient bards
 Have told us nought. We know not how they came
 To far-off Lochlann, only this we know,
 That after toiling painfully and long
 They reached the hill of Meequeen, and they thought
 To climb the hill and shout upon its top.
 But as they climbed, a man of coal-black hair,
 Of mighty size, and limbs of giant mould,
 Came rushing down to meet them, armed in steel.
 And all the three made towards him, and they met
 And fought till Brian pierced him in the breast.
 At the death-blow he fell, as falls a tree,
 And cried so loud that all the rocks above
 Seemed trembling at the sound. And now again
 Clann Tuireann pressed across the rocky slope
 And thought their road was free, their foeman slain.
 But that tremendous shout of Meequeen passed
 Over the hills and down the glens, and up
 The dark pine-wooded mountains, till his sons
 Conn, Corc and Ae, heard that despairing cry,
 And hurried down the mountain side by side.
 But when they saw them come, Clann Tuireann drew
 Together closely, and awaited them
 With spears whose points had dripped a hundred
 times
 With blood of those from whom they erst had torn

That bloody eric fine they paid to Lugh
And each to each cried words of hope and cheer,
How that their goal at last was quite attained,
And nought remaining but one struggle more
Of three to three; and surely they who oft
Had been victorious over hundreds, must
Bear off this latest victory, and come
Safe to their home, to sit beside the king
In Tara's halls and pledge the wine cup round
In memory of this brave hour of fight.
But as they urged each other with the thought
Of all those splendid future days, the three
Great sons of Meequeen faced them spear for spear,
Men of enormous size, the foster sons
Of murdered Kian. Black their hair as night,
And huge their limbs, and long their arms, and high
Their stature as their native mountain pines.
And like three oaks that shoot their roots adown
Into the rocky heart of some wild hill
And brave the tempest when it bursts above,
So stood the three; their eyes afire with hate
Beneath their fierce dark brows, to see their sire's
Warm life blood running fast before their eyes.
And with a shout like thunder when it peals
Over the trembling forests, with a rush
The three came on.

And now Clann Tuireann fought

Their last and hardest battle, blow for blow,
 And thrust for thrust, and shock for shock, and foot
 To foot, and shield to hollow shield, and frame
 To straining frame, retiring now, and now
 Gaining a space ; until their eyes grew dim
 With blood and sweat, and clotted hair ; and once
 Brian cried out : " Oh, brothers, think that this
 Is our last fight," and Meequeen's sons returned,
 " Think upon murdered Kian ; " and anon
 The six great champions would retire a space
 And lean upon their dripping swords, and pause
 For breath and strength, then lock in closer fight,
 With crash of shield on shield, and clang of blades
 And shouts and dust and trampling, while the blood
 Leaped spurting upwards. Oh, if men had known
 That such a fight of chiefs was being fought
 That evening at the foot of Meequeen's Hill
 In far-off Lochlann—there had come to see
 From out the eastern world, of men enough
 To people all the mountains. There had come
 Of those well-shapen men who handle spear
 From where amid their foliage, dark and green,
 The golden apples of Isperna gleamed.
 And there had come a hardy warrior band
 From where the sea-mews flit and scream all day
 Along the pebbly shores of Sisle's Isle.
 And from the Golden Pillars one had seen

Swart warriors darkened by excess of sun :
And not a man of them had thought the way
Too long, to see such strength and feats of arms,
But most of all to see Clann Tuireann bleed,
Who like three Deaths destroying where they passed,
Had been amongst themselves, and left a track
To scare the generations yet to come.
But now there was no eye to see, when faint
With wounds and loss of blood, those six great chiefs
Were stretched together on the mossy sward,
Just as they fell, their life blood ebbing fast.
Only the rabbit peeping from his hole,
Or frightened fawn that flitted trembling by,
Or white old owl from out some withered tree,
Saw how the sons of Meequeen died, and saw
Clann Tuireann swoon beside them, like men dead.

When in the East, behind the dark close ranks
Of aged pines, the golden sun upreared
His glorious head, and drank into himself
The gleaming night dew, then a shudder shot
Across the breast of Brian, while his swoon
Passed from him. Slowly opening both his eyes
He saw his brothers lying, with the sons
Of Meequeen stark beside them. Heavy dew
Lay on their coal-black hair, their sunken eyes
Were open, glazed and motionless, their limbs

Like logs stretched out enormous on the grass.
 Then life and memory came back again,
 He heavily uprose and came to feel
 His brothers, and he found them yet alive,
 And hope crept back into his breast once more.
 Then urging them, he cried: "Up brothers, up,
 Come climb the hill and shout we now our shouts,
 Clann Meequeen is no more." But to their feet
 They could not get them. When they thought to
 move

Out of their wounded sides the smoking blood
 Gushed forth afresh in torrents, till they fell
 Back on the moss and groaned and wished to die.
 But Brian trembled lest they should depart
 Before the eric were complete—lest bards
 Should have it not to say that they had won
 This latest triumph. And with both his arms
 He raised his brother, Yukar, and though faint
 And losing blood at every fatal step,
 He carried him across the rocky slope,
 Up to the highest ridge of that fell hill
 And laid him down, and went and came again
 With Ur upon his shoulders. There the three
 Straining their dying voices raised a weak
 Uncertain cry, of triumph—bought with death;
 That sounded like a wail—far other cry
 Than those proud shouts of victory they once

Had pictured as they sailed, and meant to roll
Over the mountain ridges and the pines,
A shout to scare the eagles, and to tell
Their triumph and their never-ending hate
Of him who sent them thither: and they meant
That in that shout the fate of Lugh should lie.
But now the hour that they had seen so oft,
Was come at last, and lo! their piteous call
Did not suffice to scare into his hole
The old grey badger sitting at its mouth.
He blinking in the sunlight, sat and saw
How Brian raised up Yukar and how Ur
Lifting his bloodless face in both his hands,
Steadied himself a moment, while that cry—
Despair was in its accents—feebly passed
His trembling lips one moment e're he swooned.

But Brian brought his brothers to their bark,
And slowly, feebly, did they raise the mast,
And feebly span the sail. But from the North
A fair breeze followed, and the gentle waves
Played softly round their vessel, and the sheets
Were ever filled with wind, nor ever slack,
Nor ever tossed by tempest. But the brave
Sea wind that fanned their faces kept alive
The wounded men; till after many days
Brian looked forth and cried: "I see the land,

Oh, yonder surely is Ben Édar's head,
 And yonder is Dún Tuireann; far away
 I see the hills of Tara." So he spake
 But they were faint and could not stand to see,
 The gladsome sight of glorious Erin's shore,
 And prayed him saying: "Brother, for the love
 Thou bearest us, oh lift our heads to see
 Once more the coast of Erin, and the hill
 Of high Ben Édar, and then let us die."
 Then Brian feebly raised their heads, and said:
 "Dear brothers, of the birds that skim the air,
 A bird could fly through both my wounded sides,
 We are as dead men be." Therewith the bark
 Struck land upon Ben Édar, and the three
 Came to Dún Tuireann. And they had no strength
 Nor any comeliness, and little speech.
 Yet through the spacious Dún there ran the cry
 That Tuireann's sons were come. That live-long day
 Their neighbours, friends and kinsmen rushed to see
 And meet and greet and feast them. But they found
 Three shadows, like the shadows of a ghost
 That moves by moonlight, pallid, long-drawn, thin,
 Bloodless and fleshless. Only Brian nursed
 What strength allowed him speech. He beckoned first
 His father Tuireann, and besought him haste
 To Lugh to Tara, there to let him know
 That all his éric fine was paid him now,

And pray him by his honour and his name,
And by the stars and moon, and all the lights
That shine in holy heaven, to lend the skin
Of healing, for a single hour to him
To lay it on their wounds and let them live.

And Tuireann hasted, for he saw the life
Was faint and flickering within his three,
And came to Tara. There he knelt and prayed,
And clasped the feet of Lugh, and by the moon
And by the stars, and by the shining sun,
And all the lights in holy heaven, conjured
The chief to lend the skin whereby his sons
Might yet recover of their yawning wounds.

Lugh listened cold and motionless, and drank
The words of Tuireann deep into his soul,
And every word was like a honey drop
To starving lips. He listened as a king
Who throning on his purple throne has bid
Some ancient bard to chant his sweetest lay
And hears the song in rapture, drinking in
Each long-drawn golden note, with head inclined
In deepest silence. And when Tuireann paused
The chieftain gave nor sign nor sound; for there
Before his fixed eyes the murdered Kian
Seemed to arise and smile. And so he let
The aged man renew his trembling prayer

Until words failed him and his force was gone.

Then at the last when all his speech was spent
Lugh coldly turning on his sandalled heel,
From the old man's embrace withdrew his foot
And strode away, vouchsafing nothing more
Than this: "I will not give your sons my skin."

Then Tuireann, spent with sorrow and with shame,
From Tara hastened back to tell his son
That all his prayers to Lugh were wasted breath,
And curse him, in his impotent despair.

But Brian said: "Oh, carry *me* to Lugh
That I may look him in the face and ask
The skin of healing which myself did win.
Me will he not refuse."

Then certain men,
His friends and kinsmen, raised him in their arms,
And brought the dying warrior to Lugh.
And Lugh when he beheld his withered arms,
And fleshless hands and sunken eyes, was glad.
And glad he was to hear his voice—the voice
As of a man who looks from hour to hour
To feel Death part his body and his soul.
For in that death Lugh knew his own life lay,
And rest for Erin. For if these should live
He knew that the De Danann race must fall,
De Danann on De Danann kindling war,
Nor joining any more to breast the waves

Of that Fomorian tide that threatened all.

But Brian looked upon him fixedly,
And painfully at last the broken words
Passed o'er his ashen lips. "O Lugh, I slew
Your father. In the hour when he was slain
My brothers both besought me hard to give
His life to him. I would not. I it was
Who slew him. We have paid an eric fine
Greater than man has ever asked before.
Give me the skin. We won it. But for us
You had not got it now. But one thing more—
I ask not for myself its healing power,
I die most willingly. But, oh, let live
My brothers, that within my father's hall
The old man may find comfort when my bones
Are bleaching. By the moon and by the sun
And by the stars and by the sacred lights
That burn in heaven on high, refuse me not."

In silence, unabashed before the death
He saw upon the suppliant's brow, unawed
By all appeals to sun or moon or stars,
Lugh listened cold and hard, unmoved as Fate,
Nor ever once withdrew his steady gaze
From Brian's quenching eyes. He answered him
Slowly, and weighing well each several word.

"I will not give the skin. You slew my sire:
Your brothers gave you aid in slaying him.

If each of you possessed ten thousand lives,
 And by one word I could preserve them all,
 I would not do it. If your tribe and race
 And all your kinsmen, and your followers all,
 Were bound to die with you, I would not stir
 One finger to preserve you. If with you
 One half the men of Erin were to die
 This very night, I would not give the skin
 To let you live. If you should offer me
 The bulk of Tara's hall of glowing gold,
 Or all the herds of sheep or silken kine
 That feed in all the world, or all the wealth
 That eastern cities hold, to give the skin,
 I would not give it. Now go back and die.
 Return to Father Tuireann, haste and die."

Then faintly Brian whispered: "'Tis enough,
 My shaft is shot in vain. Oh, fool, oh, fool,
 To think to move that vulture! Bear me hence,
 Dear friends, into my father's hall again,
 To see him ere I die."

They bore him thence
 Into his father's hall. His brothers there
 Were lying, and his people laid him down
 Between them, and they grasped each other's hands
 And bade a long and sorrowful farewell
 To father and to sister. Then with hands
 Clapsed closely, at the setting of the sun

They joined the army of the deathless dead,
Breathing their life into the setting sun,
All three together.

Then the aged man,
Their father, Tuireann, fell upon their necks,
And as he kissed their faces cold and damp
His life departed out of him.

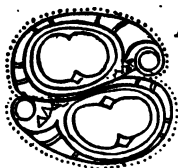
All four
Were buried in one deep wide silent grave
Before the dún. Their cairn was raised on high
And on the stone their name was truly writ
In branching Ogam, and their funeral games
Were held by Enya, and the people wept.

Thus far the fate of Tuireann's sons—thus far.





CORRIEBHRECCAN.



AINT COLUM sailed the northern
main,

The skies were black, the clouds
were low,

Our boat swept on through mist
and rain,

The waves began to come and go :

The hours grew darker and more dark,

The hurrying clouds went driving by ;

A sea-bird screamed above our bark

And vanished in the murky sky.

"Christ, save us all," our steersman said,

"Did ever man behold such sea ?

The wave turns black, the wave turns red,

It shakes a fiery crest at me.

"Such billows in a wind so small

Were never seen before of man,"

And as he spake the word through all

The quivering boat a shudder ran.

Our steersman dropped his helm aghast,
And every face with fear was wan ;
It was no tempest drave so fast,
And yet the shuddering boat swept on.

The screaming waters hissed and boiled,
Christ save us, with a murderous sound,
Like living thing our bark recoiled,
Then, buffeted, swept round and round.

The sea swelled huge beneath our keel,
And bore us upward to the sky ;
And then, ere man could think or feel,
Sheer-plunged us downward from on high.

There weltering waves as walls stood round ;
We saw them open and disclose,
Upon the oozy, green sea ground,
A skeleton that slowly rose.

Methought his bones wére wrapt in flame,
Men shouted " Corrie-Bhreca's snare ; "
For this was Breca, and he came
To pray himself for Colum's prayer.

Then, full of fear, our Colum prayed
For safety from the ensnaring sea,
And lo ! the waters sank and spread,
And tossed no more so mightily.

But Brecan's skeleton was driven
Above the waves—I saw him swim—
Our good Saint raised his eyes to heaven,
Aloud he prayed for us and him.

Oh, what a power had saintly prayer
To save us from such fearful end !
For from those weltering bones, I swear
I saw old Brecan's soul ascend.

It mounted like a vapoury wreath,
It sailed to heaven like some white dove,
The seething sea grew calm beneath,
The murky heaven grew bright above.

A sea-breeze caught our flapping sail,
And bore us swiftly on our way,
We heard the deep sea waters wail
Because they could not hold their prey.

But that good sea-breeze followed still,
And bore our bark to this loved spot—
None ever, save our Columkille,
Sailed safe from Brecan's boiling pot.

THE DRUID.

OUR Colum's bark was in the bay,
But sore our oarsmen were dismayed,
The Druid Brochan barred our way,
And shouted to his gods for aid ;

And swore by earth and sea and sun
No Christian hound should sail upon
The lake that he forbade.

His old grey hair hung loose and long
About his shoulders bowed with age,
He poured to heaven the piercing song
(Men said) of some old Pictish sage.
His eyeballs gleamed unearthly fire,
And, as his song rose ever higher,
He shook with palsied rage.

I swear his mountain demon heard,
Who knew not that our Saint was nigh,
Nor that a bearer of the Word
Was come beneath his own wild sky,
Where, king of all men's hopes and fears,
Himself, they said, a thousand years,
Had ruled as God on high.

He heard, I swear, his priest's distress,
And launched himself in one black cloud
Upon the bosom of Loch Ness,
While Pict and Scot in terror bowed,
And like a fiery thunder-snake
Came tearing down the long dark lake,
We heard him roar aloud.

Upon the wings of one wild storm,
Rushing with furious haste, he came ;
I hardly saw his dragon form,
Through sheets and tongues of forked flame.

Unceasing thunder crashed behind
The rushing of the mighty wind,
Men trembled at his name.

But through the howling of the gale
More shrill arose the Druid's cry,
"Now wretched Christian wilt thou sail?
Down on thy knees, adore and die,
And thinkest thou to cope with me?
Ye Picts and Scots, at last ye see
I am his master, I."

And all men on their faces fell,
Only St. Colum, meek and pale,
Rising against the Druid's spell,
Passed in the teeth of that wild gale,
Down to his bark, nor blenched with fear,
But bade us cross ourselves and rear
His mast and span his sail.

We strained the aching mast on high,
The raving sail we scarcely reared,
The screaming cordage lashed the sky,
We trembled while the Pagans jeered,
For there was never human oar
Could push that wind-caught bark from shore,
When such a tempest neared.

While Colum signed the cross above
Our floundering boat with outstretched hand,
The howling whirlwind burst and drove
Enormous breakers roods on land.

Yet, lo, our vessel put about,
And through the storm went up their shout,
 "His boat has left the land."

There, in the teeth of that great wind,
 Through blinding clouds of driving spray,
They saw us sail and leave behind
 Themselves and their accursèd bay.
Our boat sailed on with even keel,
The billows could not make us reel,
 The tempest could not stay.

Old Brochan cursed his powerless god,
 His starting eyeballs wild with fear,
His demon, like a monstrous clod,
 Dropped in the lake to disappear.
But far and wide the word went forth
That Christ was victor in the north,
 And Colum was His seer.

the heron.

THE frost had frozen the live-long night,
The dawn arose and the morning's light
Was feebly reflected, cold and white,
 Round all I-Columkille.
Our Saint arose from his couch of straw,
And the white hoar-frost was all he saw
 On valley and plain and hill.

I watched him rise at the dawn of day,
I saw him kneel on the floor of clay,
Thinking, as ever, a prayer to pray,
 And to bless the cloistered aisle :
But, or ever he lowered his bended knee
A vision of might he seemed to see,
 And he ceased his prayer the while.

For over the mountains, far away,
On the barren beach, where the live-long day
The eagles scream, and the sea-birds play
 On the solitary shore,
He saw a heron with pain alight,
Frozen with cold and faint from flight
 That had sailed from Erin o'er.

He saw, but not with an earthly sight,
The vision passed over his soul with might,
His eyes were closed, yet he felt the flight
 Of the pinions of the bird ;
He heard despair in its sobbing croak,
And every long-drawn weary stroke
 Of the wounded wings he heard.

He knew not my presence, but sighing sore
He looked out over the whitened moor,
" A bird from the land I revisit no more
 Is come to visit me,
An exiled bird, from that fragrant shore
That my straining eyes must see no more
 Across the driving sea."

Turning he saw me, "Brother," he said,
"Take to thee corn and oil and bread,
A bird has alit half frozen and dead
 Upon our southern strand.
Oh ! take and warm him with gentle care,
And chafe his wings, and anoint them there,
 He comes from my own loved land."

"From my own loved land,"—at the words he wept,
But myself went forth whilst the others slept,
And found the heron, and warmed and kept
 That bird for a day and night.
Our Colum feeling, though far away,
For Ireland's soil—as we feel to-day—
 Won favour in Heaven's sight.

the prophecy.

NONE can avoid his fated end,
 How vain to seek that end to know !
He falls a victim to his friend,
 Who only fears his foe.

Whilst yet our Columkille was here
 Converting men to Christ's good way,
And spreading, over all, the fear
 Of God and of His sway,

There came to him a noted man
To ask him what his end should be,
One Guaire, chieftain of a clan
Who dwelt in Corcaree.

To whom our kindly Saint, "Ah! friend,
Thy comrade, one who goes with thee,
Shall bring thee to thy destined end,
Thus far, at least, I see."

To whom the chief: "perchance my wife
May seek to wed a younger man,
Or kinsman wish to take my life
Who fain would lead my clan."

"'Tis not thy wife," our Saint replied,
"Nor is it any of thy kin,
But one who, walking by thy side,
Goes out with thee and in."

"I tell thee not by whom 'tis done,
Lest always fearing thou shouldst sigh;
I bid thee not to think thereon,
Think rather—all must die."

And as our Master thus foretold,
In little time the thing came true;
For, slipping from its leathern hold,
His own knife pierced him through.

His knife that ever by his side
A trusty friend, went out and in ;
And of that puncture Guaire died,
May Christ forgive our sin.

columkille's death.

Now when great Colum's hour drew nigh,
Before he felt or ache or pain ;
The angel told him he should die,
Then all his heart grew young again.
For he was worn with toil and care,
And age and hours of ceaseless prayer.

The angel or his own glad heart
Had told him of the hour and day,
And now he sat alone, apart,
To commune with himself and pray ;
And thrice he raised with holy smile
His hands to bless Iona's isle.

The sacred isle, the holy soil,
The heavenly altar raised by him,
The beehive cells, the corn, the oil,
The narrow cloisters worn and dim,
The good men full of busy care
Whom he had brought together there.

Some kinsmen from green Erin's strand,
Some Picts from Alba's mountains high,
With Britons from the southern land,
All housed beneath his watchful eye.
Of different tongues, of various race,
Now one in hope of God and grace.

Then as he paused, age-weary man,
Beside the stall and looked on that,
Our old white horse came down and ran
To stand before him where he sat,
And sniffed him, and as one distressed
Thrust its old head into his breast,

And rubbed its muzzle to his face,
While great salt tears ran down its eyes ;
I could not drive it from its place,
Its whinnies, were like human sighs ;
Nor from our Master's side it stirred,
Who was so good to beast and bird.

I, angry, smote it on its head,—
I blush to think that it could be—
“ Ah, let thy hand,” our Master said
“ Allow my friend to weep for me
None know, but only I and he,
That this night sets my spirit free.

" Dear unto me is all that lives,
Both birds and beasts of every kind,
Be sure our great Creator gives
Even to them some share of mind.
And God has given to him to see
That death to-night is waiting me !

" What He has hid from all the rest
Is known unto this humble beast,
Oh, Dermot, when I take my rest
Be kind, I pray, to him at least ;
Nor yet for him alone have care
But for God's creatures everywhere."

He blessed the animal, who turned
With human sobs and tears, away ;
The place whereat our white horse mourned
Yon wooden crosslet marks to-day.
But our dear Master that same night
Entered on God's eternal light !

columkille songs.

(From the Irish.)

DELIGHTFUL it is on Ben-Édar to rest
Before going over the white, white sea ;
The dash of the wave as it launches its crest
On the wind-beaten shore is delight to me.

THE THREE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING.

Delightful it is on Ben-Édar to rest
When safely come over the white sea foam ;
The coracle cleaving her way to the West
Through the sport of the waves as she beats for home.

Too swiftly my coracle flies on her way,
From Derry I mournfully turned her prow ;
I grieve at the errand which sends me to-day
To the land of the ravens, to Alba, now.

In my good little coracle, tuneful and light,
I have planted my foot, but my heart is sore,
For blind are the ignorant, blind as the night,
And weak is the man who shall lead no more.

How swiftly we travel, there is a grey eye
Looks back upon Erin, but it no more
Shall see, while the stars shall endure in the sky,
Her women, her men, or her stainless shore.

From the plank of the oak where in sorrow I lie
I am straining my sight through the water and wind ;
And large is the tear from the soft grey eye
Looking back on the land that it leaves behind.

To Erin alone is my memory given,
To Meath and to Munster my wild thoughts flow,
To the shores of Moy-linny,* the plains of Loch Levin,†
And the beautiful land the Ultonians know.

* Near Antrim.

† Now Lough Lene in Westmeath.

In the East * there is many a warrior tall,
But many a sickness and plague and care,
And many a heart that is hardened to all,
With scantness of raiment and food, to bear.

But ah ! in the West † how the apple is fair,
How many a tanist, how many a king,
How many a sloe does the thorn-tree bear,
In the acorned oaks how the young birds sing !

Melodious her clerics, melodious her birds,
Her children are gentle, her seniors wise ;
Her men are illustrious, truthful in words,
Her women have virtues for love to prize.

And Brendan the truthful is there in the West,
And Colom, descendant of Crivhan is he ;
And there in the West shall be Baithin the blest,
And there in the West shall Adamnan be.

Go carry my words to the men that I name,
Unto Comgall the priest of eternal life,
And carry my thoughts upon wings of flame
To the king of Emania the bold in strife.

I give thee my blessing to carry from here,
Take this benediction over the sea,
One seven-fold half upon Erin the dear,
One half upon Alba the same to be.

* *I.e.*, in Scotland.

† *I.e.*, in Ireland.

To the nobles that gem the bright Isle of the Gael
Carry this benediction over the sea ;
And bid them not credit Moleesha's tale,
And bid them not credit his words of me.

Were it not for the word of Moleesha's mouth,
At the cross of Ahamlish that sorrowful day,
I now should be warding from north and from south,
Disease and distemper from Erin away.

Oh, carry my blessing away to the West,
For my heart in my bosom is broken, I fail ;
Should death of a sudden now pierce my breast,
I should die of the love that I bear the Gael.

The Gael, oh ! the Gael, how the sound of that name
When I speak it can banish my ruth and my rue ;
Belovèd is Cuimin of fair-haired fame,
Beloved are Cainneach and Comgall too.

And, oh ! were the tributes of Alba mine,
From shore unto centre, from centre to sea,
The site of one house, to be marked by a line,
In the midst of fair Derry were dearer to me.

That spot is the dearest on Erin's ground,
For the treasures that peace and that purity lend ;
For the hosts of bright angels that circle it round,
Protecting its borders from end to end.

That spot is the dearest on Erin's ground,
For its peace and its beauty I gave it my love ;
Each leaf of the oaks around Derry is found
To be crowded with angels from heaven above.

My Derry, my Derry, my little oak grove,
My dwelling, my home, and my own little cell ;
May God the Eternal, in heaven above,
Send woe to thy foes and defend thee well.

Belovèd are Durrow and Derry to me,
And Drumhome of the fruits of the rich ripe hue
Belovèd Raphoe in its purity,
And Surd* and Cenannas,* I love them too.

And dear to my heart in the western land,
Is the thought of Loch Foyle where the cool waves
pour,
And the Bay of Drumcliff on Cúlcinne's strand,
Delightful the form of its sloping shore.

Delightful it is, and the salt salt main,
Where the sea-birds scream o'er the water blue,
On my coming from Derry afar in pain,
How quiet it is, and delightful too.

* The Irish names for Swords and Kells.

farewell to ara.

(From the Irish. Columkille Sang.)

FAREWELL from me to Ara's isle,
 Farewell a while dear isle to thee ;
 I go to breast the water's roar,
 To seek the shore of silent Í.*

Farewell from me to Ara's isle,
 Her smile is at my heart no more,
 No more to me the boon is given
 With hosts of Heaven to walk her shore.

Farewell from me belovèd isle,
 No hopes beguile my clouded eye ;
 Because it is my last farewell
 Words cannot tell how sad am I.

Farewell from me to Ara's coast,
 I sorrow most to leave her sea :
 Bright troops of angels round her float,
 But none to man my boat with me.

O Modan Mór, thou knowest not
 What blessed lot is thine this day,
 Thou livest here without a sigh ;
 While I—must wander far away.

* Pronounced "Ee," i.e., the island of Iona.

How far, alas ! how far, alas !

Have I to pass from Ara's view ;
To mix with men from Mona's fen,
With men from Alþa's mountains blue.

The son of Him, the living God,
Has changed the sod where I may be,
From Ara, home of Pilgrims pure,
I seek the shore of savage Í.

Bright orb of Ara, Ara's sun,
Ah ! slowly run through Ara's sky,
To rest beneath thy beam were sweeter
Than lie where Paul and Peter lie.

To hear the tones of Ara's bell
That men from hell to heaven entice,
Bright orb of Ara, Ara's sun,
'Twere all as one as Paradise !

Bright orb of Ara, Ara's sun,
My course is run and I must go,
But they beneath thy smile who lie
No devil's eye shall ever know.

O Ara, darling of the west,
Ne'er be he blest who loves not thee ;
O God, cut short her foeman's breath,
Let Hell and Death his portion be.

O Ara, darling of the west,
Ne'er be he blessed who loves not thee,
Herdless and childless may he go
In endless woe his doom to dree !

O Ara, darling of the west,
Ne'er be he blest who loves thee not !
When angels wing from heaven on high
And leave the sky for this dear spot.

* * *

To hearken to the angels' song
The cliffs along in Ara dear—
No lot more blessed under heaven
Was ever given mortals here.

CRÍOCH.





NOTES.

THE "Three Sorrows of Story-telling" are three Irish romances, each written in prose, but interspersed with many pieces of verse after the usual manner of Irish saga. In the versions which I have followed, there are 340 lines of verse in Déirdre, 228 lines in the Children of Lir, and 156 lines in the Children of Tuireann.

Of the three stories, which are all ancient tragedies founded respectively on love, jealousy, and murder, Déirdre, or the Fate of the Children of Usnach, is by far the most renowned and widely known,—“is known,” as Dr. Cameron puts it, “over all the lands of the Gael, both in Ireland and Scotland.” It is also, to my mind, the best conceived and best executed of the three in the original. I have said in the original, but in fact there are several Irish and Gaelic versions of it. There is the very brief and ancient copy in the twelfth century *Book of Leinster*, published by Windisch, and compared by him with a fifteenth century version in the British Museum. There is O’Curry’s fourteenth century text which he published in the *Atlantis*—an extinct Irish magazine. There is a very short and ancient version published by O’Flanagan in that delightful and quaint old volume, the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin* in 1808—which lent many a good Irish

hint to the poet Moore—and there is the longer and more modern copy in the same volume; these two I have, in my version, blended together. Then there are the two versions in the Advocates' Library at Edinburgh, published both by Whitley Stokes and Dr. Cameron, in *Irische Texte* and *Reliquiæ Celticæ* respectively, and I have met many copies of the story in modern manuscripts not to speak folk-lore versions. The versions which I have here followed may, perhaps, be considered the normal and standard ones. According to many MSS., however, Déirdre did not die over the grave of the Sons of Usnach, but was first kept for a year by Conor, and killed herself by leaping out of his chariot, which is probably the older version.

The "Children of Lir" has twice been published in the original, once by O'Curry in the *Atlantis*, from a text put together out of a great number of MSS., none of which contained it complete, and afterwards—from O'Curry's text—by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. I made the present translation from a dirty little black manuscript of my own, which contained little more than this story, but upon afterwards comparing it with O'Curry's text, I found the two nearly alike.

"The Children of Tuireann" was also published by O'Curry in *Atlantis*, and again—his text of it—by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. It is their edition of the story that I have followed. I do not remember ever meeting a variant of it. Dr. Joyce, too, has published English translations of both these stories.

Of the three tales, the first is in the original somewhat longer than the present poem; the second is about the same length as my English version; but the third is con-

siderably longer, because no less than 22 pages out of the 64 of the Irish text are taken up with an account of the wanderings of the Children of Tuireann during their search for the eric; but this, for the sake of preserving the epic unity of the piece, I have entirely omitted, as well as some pages at the beginning concerning the leeching of Nuadh's arm, which have no bearing on the story.

It will be well to give here some specimens of the literal translation of the text of each of the three stories, as showing more clearly what they are like in the original :—

I.

EXTRACT FROM "DÉIRDRE," LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

"And when Fergus came into the harbour he sent forth from him the loud cry of a mighty man of chase. And Naesi and Déirdre were then seated together, and the polished cabinet between them, that was Conor's chess board, and they playing upon it. Naesi heard the cry, and said—'I hear the call of a man of Erin.'

"'That was not the call of a man of Erin,' said Déirdre, 'but the call of a man of Alba (Scotland).' Déirdre knew the first cry of Fergus, but she concealed it. Fergus uttered the second cry. 'That is the cry of a man of Erin,' said Naesi. 'It is not, indeed,' said Déirdre, 'and let us play on.'

"Fergus sent forth the third cry, and then the sons of Usnach knew it was Fergus that sent forth the cry, and Naesi said to Ardan, to go and meet Fergus. Déirdre (then) said she knew the first call sent forth by Fergus.

"'Wherefore, then, didst thou conceal it, O queen?' said Naesi.

"'A vision I saw last night,' said Déirdre, 'namely, three birds to come to us from Emania of Macha, and three drops of honey with them in their mouths, and them to leave them with us, and them to take with them three drops of our blood.'

"'What interpretation hast thou of that, O queen?' said Naesi.

"'It is,' said Déirdre, 'Fergus to come to us with a message of peace from Conor, for not sweeter than honey is the message of peace of the lying man.'

“ ‘Let that be,’ said Naesi, ‘Fergus is long in the port, and do thou, Ardan, rise up and meet him and bring him with thee.’ ”

“ ‘Ardan moves forward to where Fergus was, and bestows kisses, dearly and earnestly, on himself and his two sons along with him ; and thus he said :—‘ My affection be unto you, O dear companions,’ said he, and after that he asked of them tidings of Erin, and they told him. And after that, they came to where Naesi, Ainle, and Déirdre were, and they bestowed many kisses on Fergus and his sons, and asked tidings of them about Erin. ‘The best tidings we have,’ said Fergus, ‘is Conor to be sending us as guarantee and security for ye.’ ‘They should not go to him,’ said Déirdre ; for greater is their own sway in Alba than the sway of Conor in Erin.’ ”

“ ‘One’s native country is better than everything,’ said Fergus, ‘for uncheering it is to a man, however great his prosperity and kinship, unless he sees his own native country each day,’ ” etc.

II.

EXTRACT FROM THE “CHILDREN OF LIR,” LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

“As for Bove Derg and the Tuatha De Danann, they came to the shores of Loch Darvra, and they encamped there, listening to the music of the swans. As for the clans of the Milesians—no less did they come out of every quarter in Erin in like manner. For historians do not count any music or harmony that was ever heard in Erin before [to have been anything] in comparison with the music of those swans. And the swans used to be telling stories and conversing with the men of Erin each day, and discoursing with their pupils and foster-brothers and with all their friends, and they were wont to sing ever-melodious fairy music every night ; and each one who used to hear that music used to sleep softly and soundly, no matter what disease or long sickness were on him : for every one who heard them used to be joyous and high-spirited after the music the birds used to sing.”

III.

EXTRACT FROM THE “CHILDREN OF TUIREANN,” LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

“When Lugh reached Tara, he sat, noble and honoured, by the side of the King of Erin. And Lugh looked round him, and he saw the children of Tuireann, and those three were the best

in dexterity and fight, and the handsomest and most honourable of all in Tara at that time, and they it was who performed the best deeds in the battle against the Fomorians. It was then Lugh ordered the listening chain of the palace to be sounded. And it was so done, and all listened. Then said Lugh: 'To whom are ye all now giving your attention, O ye Tuatha De Dananns?'

" 'Truly to thee,' said they.

" 'I ask of your nobles,' said he, 'what is the vengeance each one of ye would take upon those who should slay the father of any one of ye?'

" A great silence fell upon them all after they heard that; and the King of Erin answered first, and 'twas what he said:

" 'We know it was not thy father, who is slain.'

" 'It is he, indeed,' said Lugh, 'and I see now here within the men who killed him, and they do not know, better than I know, the killing that they gave him.'

" The King of Erin said:—'It is not the killing of one day that I myself would give to the man who should kill my father, but to take a limb off him each day, one after the other, till he should die by me, if he were in my power.'

" All the nobles said the same thing, and Clan Tuireann said as said the rest."

Of the Three Sorrows of Story-telling the tale of Déirdre belongs to the great epic and heroic cycle of Cuchulain and the Red Branch Knights—is, in fact, one of the keystones of that cycle; for it was in consequence of the children of Usnach being slain while under the protection of Fergus, that this leader, with all his forces, went over to Mève, Queen of Connacht, and joined in the great Táin Bo Chualgne. These events, if they have any historical basis—and no doubt they have—took place, according to Irish computation, about the first century before Christ.

To a completely different class of stories belongs the Children of Tuireann—to the mythological cycle. The personages and events of that cycle are almost certainly

reminiscences of the early Irish Pantheon. No one has of late seriously contended that the beings who figure in this cycle are other than deities euhemerized or treated as men. The Irish annalists themselves separate them from the contemporaries of Déirdre by a gulf of some seventeen hundred years. Lugh the Long-handed may plausibly be equated, as D'Arbois de Jubainville has pointed out, with the Greek Belerophon.

To this cycle the beginning of the Children of Lir also belongs. The peculiarity of this touching story is that its conduct is prolonged over so great a space of time, bringing it down to the Christian era. My own opinion is that it was originally a story of Pagan origin, and that the Christian conclusion was added to it in after times. Only, if this be so, the dove-tailing has been much more ably carried out than in most pieces of the kind, where the Christian and Pagan parts easily come asunder at the slightest analysis. The widely-spread popular superstition in Ireland that it is unlucky to kill a swan, seems to me to point to the Pagan origin of the story, for if the whole were a post-Christian invention there would then *ex hypothesi* be no reason against killing a swan, since the Children of Lir were swans no longer; and the superstition could not have arisen. If, however, it had its birth in Pagan times, the Christian conclusion of the story would not have sufficed to put an end to it. That the superstition still prevails widely is undoubted.

"I knew," says O'Curry, "of a curious instance of ill luck attributed to such an act. A man named Connor Griffin killed eleven swans by one shot of a gun at night as he heard them fly past his house and took them for wild geese. He had been previously a prosperous man, but shortly after, his son was drowned in the Lower Shannon, his boats were lost, his wife died, and he

never after enjoyed his former happiness ; and all these consequences were attributed by his neighbours to the accident of his shot."

The same reluctance to kill, or when killed to eat a swan, prevails in parts, if not in the whole of Connacht. I knew one man who shot a swan, and his father would not allow it to be eaten. Another man assured me he had once shot one, and if he lived for a thousand years he never would do so again. I have never tried the experiment myself, but if it be true that

—*facinus qui cogitat ullum*
Facti crimen habet—

I should be most certainly amenable to all the supernatural penalties of cygnicide ; but though I have fulfilled the Highland saying, *seilgire thu nuair mharbhas tu gé corr agus crotach*, I have hitherto found the *eala* one too many for me !

Page 67. The Fairy Host is another and later name for the De Dananns. I have often heard the old people of Connacht use the words, *Tuatha De Danann*, for the invisible people of fairy-land.

Page 72. There would appear at first sight some confusion in making Lir and his contemporaries live so long — over three hundred years on the shores of Lake Darvra—and then putting an end to them in this way. But the universal tradition was that when the Milesians waxed too strong and overran the country, the Dananns being skilled in wizardry were able to retire into the green hills where they continued to live, invisible or seldom appearing. Hence the belief that the De Dananns are the fairies.

The children of Lir, however, did not know what was going on during their exile. That the De Dananns were supposed to have died as other people from wounds, appears from very many sagas, yet from others it would appear as if some of them, at least, lived on without death.

Page, 130. Corrievrecan, in Irish *Coipe Òhneacan* means Breacan's Cauldron. It seems to have been part of the channel, according to Dr. Reeves, between Ballycastle and the Island of Rathlin. Breacan the son of Mainé, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, was engulfed there more than a hundred years before Columkille's time, and hence the name. The appellation, however, has long been transferred to the disturbed waters between Scarba and Jura on the Scotch coast :

“ Scarba's isle, whose tortured shore
Still rings to Corryvrecan's roar.”

The Irish vortex is now known locally, says Dr. Reeves, as *Slugnamorra* (*Slug na mórna*), “Gulp of the Sea.” No doubt, he adds, it is to it that picturesque description of Giraldus Cambrensis refers : “Non procul ab insulis a parte boreali est maris quædam admiranda vorago ; ad quam a remotis partibus omnes undique marini fluctus, tanquam ex conducto, confluunt, et concurrunt, qui in secreta naturæ penetralia, se ibi transfundentes, quasi in abyssum vorantur.” My friend, Mr. W. Doherty, C.I., differs from Dr. Reeves as to the locality of the original Corrievrecan, and will probably set the matter at rest in a forthcoming volume.

Page 139. I may quote here a portion of the original as a good example of Adamnan's style. I may mention that he was born in 624, twenty-seven years after the death of

Columkille, one of whose successors in the Abbacy of Í (or Iona) he was

"Post haec Sanctus horreum egreditur, et ad monasterium revertens, media residet via, in quo loco postea crux molari infixi lapidi hodieque stans, in margine cernitur viæ. Dumque ibidem Sanctus, ut præfatus sum, senio fessus, paululum sedens, requiesceret, ecce albus occurrit caballus, obediens servitor, qui scilicet lactaria bocetum* inter et monasterium vascula gestare consueverat. Hic ad Sanctum accedens, mirum dictu, caput in sinu ejus ponens, ut credo inspirante Deo, cui omne animal rerum sapit sensu quo jusserit ipse Creator, dominum a se suum mox emigraturum, et ipsum ultra non visurum sciens, coepit plangere, ubertimque, quasi homo, lacrymas in gremium Sancti fundere, et valde spumans flere. Quod videns minister, coepit illum flebilem repellere lamentatorem; sed Sanctus prohibuit eum, dicens, 'Sine hunc, sine nostrum amatorem, ut in hunc meum sinum fletus effundat amarissimi plangoris. Ecce tu, homo, cum sis, et rationalem animam habeas, nullo modo scire de meo exitu potuisti, nisi quod tibi ego ipse nuper manifestavi: huic vero bruto et irrationali animanti, quoque modo ipse Conditor voluit, egressurum a se dominum manifeste revelavit. Et haec dicens maestum a se revertentem equum benedixit ministratorem.'"

Page 141. This is a poem of Columkille's or at least ascribed to him. It is in very irregular metre, or rather changes its metre several times. The literal translation of the first few verses is as follows:—

"Delightful to be on Ben Edar (the Hill of Howth) before going over the sea, white, white; the dashing of the wave against its face, the bareness of its shore and its border.

"Delightful to be on Ben Edar after coming over the white-bosomed sea, to be rowing one's little coracle, ochone! on the swift-waved shore.

"How rapid the speed of my coracle, and its back turned to Derry! It is misery to me, my errand over the high-sea, travelling towards Alba of the ravens.

"My foot in my musical little coracle, my heart pitiable, sorrowful. Weak is the man that cannot lead. Blind totally is every ignorant one.

* "This word seems peculiar to the Irish school" says Reeves. It means a cow-house or byre or *bunúir*.

"There is a grey eye that looks back upon Erin, but it shall not see during life the men of Erin nor her women.

"My sight over the brine I stretch, from the planking of stout oak. Large is the tear of my soft grey eye, when I look back towards Erin," etc.

Part of this poem may very well be Columkille's own, but part is as evidently not his. The end of it was probably written by one of the monks of Derry, whose monastery, in after times, almost equalled in fame that of Iona itself.

The verse about the soft grey eye is found in the *Leabhar na h'Uidhre* in the preface to the *Amra* of Columkille which shows its antiquity.

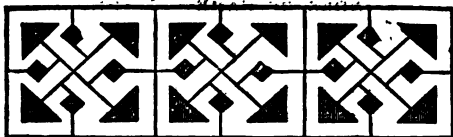
Moleesha (*Molaoire*) was the Saint who imposed it as a penalty upon Columkille that he should go into exile and there convert as many souls as there were men slain in the battle of Cooldrevna, fought on his account.

Page 146. O'Flanagan printed the text of this poem in 1808, but I do not know from what MS. The text of the former poem is from a Brussels MS. made by Michael O'Clery and used by Colgan. The literal translation of the first verses of the Farewell to Ara, is as follows:—

"Farewell from me to Ara, a sad farewell as I think it, me to be sent eastward to Í, and it . . . from the flood. Farewell from me to Ara, it is that anguishes my heart, not to be westward at her waves, amid bands of the saints of heaven," etc.

There is a MS. in the Bodleian Library which is said to contain nearly 100 poems ascribed to Columkille.

Knowing the trouble that Irish names are to the English reader, I give here a list of them, with the original orthography and the ordinary Irish pronunciation. As there are only three letters in the Irish alphabet radically different from those in the English alphabet, *i.e.*, *ḡ*, *ṛ* and *ṣ* (*g*, *r*, and *s*), I have used the native one.



INDEX OF NAMES TO THE THREE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING.

A.

Achill, p. 70 = *Acail*, an island off the coast of Mayo, recently connected with the mainland by a bridge.

Aév, p. 42 = *Acob*, pronounced *Eve* in Connacht, *Aéu* rhyming to "slave" in Munster.

Aé, p. 44 = *Acob*, pronounced *Aé* rhyming to "pay" in Munster, and *Ee* rhyming to "he" in Connacht, Anglicised "Hugh."

Aivric, p. 69 = *Acibric*, pronounced *av-uric*.

Ainé, p. 11 = *Acine*, pronounced generally *Anya*, a Munster fairy queen.

Ainlé, p. 16 = *Acinle*, pronounced *Anlé*.

Alba, p. 14 = *Acba*, gen. *Acban*. Dat. *Acban*, whence English Albyn = Scotland.

Angus, p. 41 = *Acogur*, pronounced *Aénus* or corruptly *Aeneesh*; Anglicised *Angus*, and so probably pronounced in Old Irish.

Ardan, p. 16 = *Acroán*.

Assaroe, p. 36 = *Acarruath* = the Red Waterfall, on the Erne near Ballyshannon, pronounced *ass-rooe*.

Asal, p. 106 = *Acral*, an old Irish name.

B.

- Banba, p. 41 = *Banba*, a common name for Erin.
- Balor, p. 89 = *Balar*, pronounced *Bollar*, king of the Fomorians, called sometimes *balcbéimeanna* "of the stout blows," sometimes "of the Evil Eye."
- Ben Edar, p. 123 = *Benn Édar*, the Hill of Howth, pronounced *Bin-aydir*.
- Bras, p. 90 = *Breas*, an old Irish name, pronounced *Brass*.
- Brian, p. 92 = *Brian*, pronounced *Bree-an*, probably the name of an Irish god, and the same name as Brennus, leader of the Gauls.
- Buiné, p. 21 = *Buine*, pronounced *Bwinnd*. Benné seems to have been an older form of this name.
- Bove Derg, p. 41 = *Bodh Dearg*, pronounced *Bove* or *Boww D'yarrag*.

C.

- Cliona, p. 11 = *Cliona* or *Cliona*, pronounced *Cleeona*, a fairy queen of Munster, from whom the Wave of Cliona was called, where she was drowned, near Clonakilty in Cork.
- Conor, p. 2 = *Concúbar*, properly pronounced *Cunnhoor* but usually and corruptly *Cnuch-hoor* and *Cruch-hoor* or *Cro-hore*. In ancient Irish the name is "Concobar," and was probably so pronounced:
- Conall Carnach, p. 29 = *Conall Carnach*, i.e., Conall the Vanquisher, a favourite figure in the Red Branch Cycle.
- Conn, p. 118 = *Conn*, pronounced *Cunn* in Connacht, *Cown* in Munster, a favourite old Irish name.
- Corc, p. 118 = *Corc*, pronounced *kurk*; a common old Irish name.
- Cone, p. 22 = *Cuan*, i.e., harbour, pronounced *coon* or *coo-an*.
- Cuchulainn, p. 29 = *Cú-culainn*, pronounced *Coo-húlin* or *Coo-hoolin*.
- Colman, p. 77 = *Colmán*, pronounced *Kulmaun*; a common Irish name,

D.

Dagda=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌆 or 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌆, the Jupiter of the Irish Pantheon.

The name probably means the "Good God."

Darvra, p. 50=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌆, pronounced *Dar-uruch*, now Lake Derryvaragh, a beautiful loch in the Co. Westmeath.

Déirdre=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, pronounced *Dare-drá*. The word is said to mean "alarm."

De Danann, p. 21=𐌦𐌆 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, i.e., the race that preceded the present Milesians in the possession of Ireland. They have now become the "fairies" of the peasantry, pronounced *Day-Donnan*.

Drayno, p. 22=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌆, pronounced *Dry* or *Dree-nach*, i.e., "the thorny place."

Decca, p. 77=𐌦𐌆𐌆, pronounced *D'yuch*.

Doon, p. 14=𐌦𐌆𐌆 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, i.e., the House of Donn. He was the eldest son of Milesius (whence Milesians) drowned off the coast of Kerry. It is probably, says O'Curry, the Kerry headland called Brandon Hill or *Cnoc Bhrennain*.

Dobar, p. 166=𐌦𐌆𐌆𐌆, probably a fanciful name.

Dúnfin, p. 22=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, i.e., the White Fortress. O'Flanagan commenting on the word Fincarn exclaims with amusing heat, "Dr. Smith would have called this *Fingal's heap*, ha! ha! as he called *Dunfin*, *Fingal's tower*. Gracious God! we never had a Fingal!"

Dún Tuireann=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, pronounced *Doon Tirran*, i.e., Tuireann's fortress or mansion.

E.

Eefi, p. 42=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆, pronounced *Eefá*.

Elva, p. 42=𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆, pronounced *Alva*.

Emania, p. 1, the Latinized form of Emhain, 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆 or 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆, pronounced *arvin* or *yew-an* or *yow-an*, the capital of the Utonian dynasty near Armagh. Generally called 𐌦𐌆𐌒𐌆𐌒𐌆 *macla*.

Enya, p. 115=Εἰθνε, pronounced *Enna* or *Enya*. It means the kernal of the sweet hazel nut.

Erris Downan, p. 52=Ιορρῆνν Dorhnann, pronounced *Irriis Downan*, in co. Mayo, called from the Domnans who were a branch of the Firbolgs.

F.

Félim, p. 2, In the old Irish version Φεολίμνιρ, modern Φερό-
λίμνιρ=Phelimy. There is also Φερόλίμ, pronounced *Fay-lim*.

Fergus, p. 21=Φερῆςγυρ.

Falinnis, p. 107=Φαλ-ιννιρ, apparently an anagram of Inis-fail.

Fiachra, p. 44=Φιαχρα, pronounced *Fel-ā-chra*, the *ch* guttural.

Finnuala, p. 44=Φιοννῆσῶαλα, i.e., "white shoulder," pronounced *Finn-ōb-ā-la*, often shortened into Nuala, a Christian name not yet extinct, pronounced *Noo-ā-la*.

Fiancarya=Φιανῆαρη, pronounced *Feean-charā*, *ch* guttural.

Fomorian=Φόμορ, pronounced *Fo-wur*. The Φόμορῶνγ were the race who oppressed the De Dananns. They are said to have been "sea pirates."

Finnin, p. 77=Φινῆιν, pronounced *Finnéen*, a common name down to the 17th century.

G.

Glanmassan, p. 22=Γλεανν Μῆαράν, pronounced *Glan Vossaun* or *Wossaun*.

Glendaroe, p. 22=Γλεανν ῥά Ρῶαῖρ, pronounced *Glan daw Roo-a*, i.e., the glen of the two roes.

Glorra, isle of Glorra, p. 69=Ινιρ Γλουαρη, pronounced *Innish Gloor-ya*.

I.

Ildána, p. 83=Ιολῶνάαῖ, pronounced *Il-dānack*, i.e., man of many sciences, another name of Lugh the Long-handed.

Illan, p. 21=Iollann, pronounced *Illan* or *Ullan*, a common name in Irish romance.

Iniskea=Inir Gáo=Goose island, off the west coast of Mayo.

Irrua=Iorua= some part of Norway or Scandinavia, a place of common occurrence in Irish tales.

Isberna, p. 112=Irbéirne, evidently the garden of the Hesperides.

K.

Kian=Cian, pronounced *Kee-an*, a common name until lately.

Kildalua, p. 43=Cill Dála, pronounced *Kill Dalooa*, i.e., St. Dalua's church, now Killaloe.

Keevóg, p. 75=Mochamóg, pronounced *Mochavogue*, the *ch* guttural.

L.

Lavarcam, p. 5=Leabaircam, pronounced *Lavarcham*, *ch* guttural, probably from labair, to speak, because she is called Conor's bean-camte or "talking woman."

Lairgnean, p. 77=Lairgnén, pronounced *Larg-nane*.

Laidh, p. 22, vale of Laidh=Gleann Láir, pronounced *Loya*.

Lir, p. 41=Lir, pronounced *Lirrh* or *Lear*.

Lochlann, p. 82=Loðlann, pronounced *Luchlan*, the *ch* guttural, i.e., a general name for Scandinavia.

Lugh, p. 83=Lúg, pronounced *Loo*.

M.

Manannan, p. 29=Manannán, pronounced *Mon-on-awn*, the son of Lear or Lir, the Irish Neptune.

Méve, p. 1=Méaróð, pronounced *Mave*, rhyming to "slave," but in Connacht at present it seems to be sounded like Mow, rhyming to "cow." She was the great queen of Connacht.

Moy Murhemna, p. 92=Máξ Muirteirne, pronounced *Maw* or *Moy Muir-hev-na*, the plain from the Boyne to near Carlingford.

Moytura, p. 97=Μαῖς Τυρρεῶς, pronounced *Moy Tirra*, in the barony of Tirerril, co. Sligo.

Moyle, p. 14. It is Moore who has popularized this form of the Irish Ḡrūt na Maíle, pronounced *Sruh na Mweeld*, i.e., the "flood of the bald point," the bald point being the Μαῶλ (*mweel, mwael, moyle or mull*) of Cantire, which gives its Irish name to the sea between Ireland and Scotland at that point.

Meequeen, p. 107=Μίσιόβαιον, so pronounced, or nearly so.

N.

Naesi=Ναῖνι, in more modern form Ναινε, pronounced *Nee-shd*.

Nuadh=Νυᾶδ, pronounced *Noo-d*.

O.

Oilioll, p. 44=Οἰλιόλλ, pronounced like *Ulyul* or *Ell-yul*, a common name amongst the very ancient Irish.

P.

Peeshar, p. 106=Πίρεαρ, so pronounced, a fantastic name.

R.

Rock na Rone, p. 62=Ραρηνας na ρόν=the seal's rock.

S.

Shee Finnaha, p. 41=Ḡíot Φιοννᾶνῶ, pronounced *Sheeh Inn-d-chee*, *ch* guttural, i.e., "the fairy hill of the white field" in Armagh. Φιονν-ᾶνῶ=white field.

Sisla, p. 106=Ḡίρλε=Sicily, pronounced *Sheesh-lá*.

T.

Tailcinn, p. 52=Ταίλκινν, i.e., Adze-head, a name for St. Patrick, probably so-called from his tonsure, pronounced *Taul-kin*.

Tailltin, p. 41=Ταίλλτε, *gen.*, Taillteann, pronounced *Talt-ydn*, hence the ridiculous English form Telltown which in the teeth of O'Donovan's opposition was forced upon us by the Ordnance Survey people. This was the famous place of fairs and Olympic games in the Co. Meath.

Tir-na-nóg=Τίρ νά ν-όγ, pronounced *T'yeer na n-ogue*, *ogue* rhyming to "rogue."

Tuireann, p. 82=Τυίρεανν, pronounced *Tirran*, the *i* having the sound of *i* in *bit*.

Tairngir, p. 83=Τίρ Τηαιργιγίρε, i.e., the land of prophecy, probably a fantastical Biblical allusion of late date, pronounced *T'yeer Har-in-gär-yä*.

Toosh, p. 106=Τούτ, so pronounced.

U.

Ultonia, p. 1=the Latinized form of *Ularó*, pronounced *Ulla*, the Irish name of Ulster.

Usna, p. 8=Usíneac, *gen.* Usíneig, pronounced *Us* or *Isnach*, now Usnagh Hill, to the west of Tara in Westmeath. It used to be a very celebrated place for its assemblies, and because the Beltane or *Bealtaine* (pronounced *Bal-tín-a*) fires were first lighted there on the 1st of May.

Ur, p. 92=Uar, pronounced *Oo-är*. In many copies of the tale he is called *luárbá=yoo-charba*, the *ch* guttural.

Y.

Yukar, p. 92=luáir, pronounced *Yooch-ar*, the *ch* guttural.

INDEX OF IRISH WORDS USED.

Geasa, in Irish *Geasa*, pronounced *gassa*, is a word which seems to mean mystical injunctions. I am under *geasa* not to do it, means I am solemnly bound not to do it, it is taboo'd to me. The word is still in common use.

Eric=a fine, or blood-money. Irish *eíric*, pronounced *ay-ric*. A man's *eric* is the fine that must be paid for killing him. It is the exact equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon *wer*.

Truaighe na Sgeuligheachta=“Sorrows” or “Pities of Story-telling,” pronounced *troo-ě-ă na skail-ee-ăchta*.

Ogam=a cryptic method of writing, like the northern runes, chiefly used on pillar stones and the monuments of the dead. In later times the *g* became aspirated, and the word was pronounced *oo-ăm*, nearly rhyming to “room” by the Munstermen, and *ow-ăm* (the *ow* rhyming to “how”) elsewhere. Whether the *o* was originally long or short, that is whether the word was pronounced *uggam* or *ogue-am*, seems doubtful.



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